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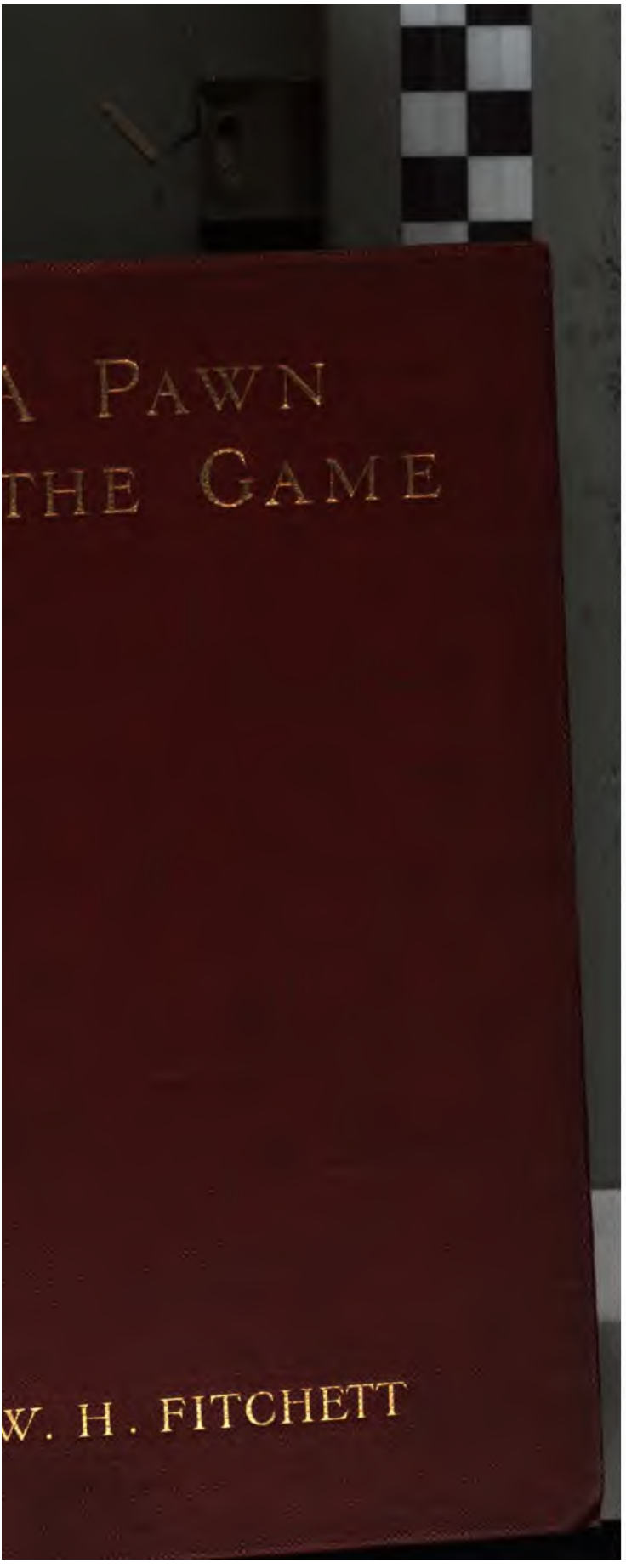
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THE GAME
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A PAWN IN THE GAME

BY

W. H. FITCHETT, B.A., LL.D.

AUTHOR OF

"DEEDS THAT WON THE EMPIRE,"

"HOW ENGLAND SAVED EUROPE," ETC.

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A PAWN IN THE GAME

CHAPTER I

THE FRENCHWOMAN

"LAWRENCE," said the bigger man of the two—a huge, careless figure, with black hair, daring eyes, and complexion dusky red—"Lawrence, Madame Thiebault is as sweet a woman as ever came across the Channel. Her eyes would bewilder a saint, and her wit is as bright as her eyes. But, after all, we English folk want in our wives something a little safer and less dazzling. There is a mystery about her, and we don't like mysteries in the family circle. Where does she come from? Who was the late M. Thiebault? And that solemn-faced major-domo of hers is as much a problem as his mistress."

"I am old enough," answered Lawrence, a little grimly, "not to make a fool of myself."

"Ah," said the big man, his eyes rolling with a sort of quizzical kindness on his companion, "all the frosty hairs of Methuselah won't save even a wise man from making a fool of himself where a woman as pretty as Madame Thiebault is concerned. Marriage," he went on in the tone of a philosopher discussing some abstract

problem, "marriage at best is a gamble. Not that I, of all men, should object to it on that ground," he added with an odd gleam of half-rueful humour. "But in a game with such stakes we ought at least to know the cards. And what do you really know about this Frenchwoman? Why is she so friendly with those young fellows from the French ambassador's house?"

"I have got common-sense enough to take care of myself," replied Lawrence. But he found his big companion's questions both inconvenient and exasperating; and his cheeks flushed under his black eyebrows.

"Yes," said the elder man relentlessly; "but common-sense loses its authority where a lady with Madame Thiebault's dazzling eyes is concerned. Why, they would melt that solemn icicle Pitt himself." And the huge figure of the speaker shook with laughter. "But," he added with a sudden touch of gravity, "those soft eyes can look as hard as steel on occasion."

The pair had come out of that most famous and dangerous of London clubs—Brooks's. The big man was Fox, the kindest heart, the shrewdest brain, the most reckless gambler in England. He could be wise for anybody but himself. Lawrence his friend, a wealthy London banker, to Fox's half-amused concern, had fallen a sudden victim to the charms of Madame Thiebault, a Frenchwoman of uncertain antecedents, who somehow had got a footing in London society. Lawrence was no heavy-witted London "cit." The keen eyes which looked out from beneath his strong black brows showed he was a man of exceptional force. His wealth was great. A branch of his business was established in Paris, and his name carried weight in the financial circles of every continental capital. From

Paris he had caught something of its easy morals; something, too, of its daring politics. He belonged in public affairs to Fox's school, and a warm sympathy bound the two masterful natures together.

Lawrence was a widower with one boy, a sturdy eight-year-old lad, with the honest eyes of his dead mother. Fox's glance, for all his aspect of lazy unconcern, was curiously alert and observant. His friend was falling into the power of the too dangerous Frenchwoman. Himself a keen politician, he yet disliked political women, and this was one reason, amongst others, why he thought the Frenchwoman dangerous.

"Why," he demanded of his friend, "should she care for politics, or at least for politicians, so much? She turns old Lord G—— round her dainty little fingers. She will be at his grand party to-night; and Lawrence, old fellow, in spite of my warnings, you will be there too. You know that at bottom you are a sober-blooded Englishman. When you marry again you will want a domestic fireside, and a wife to stay there contentedly with you. Now, Madame Thiebault is a comet; and you cannot sit by the domestic hearth in company with a comet." And once more the big man shook with easy laughter.

"Lawrence," he concluded, "I have expended more sober sense on you in twenty minutes than I have spent on myself in twenty years, and it will all be wasted." And, with a good-humoured nod, the big man—the cleverest, yet the most reckless figure in the three kingdoms—turned away from his friend. After taking a few steps, however, he turned back. "I know human nature. Youth can trifle with love, but a man of your years can't. The climax will be sudden either

way. It will be a sudden breach or a sudden marriage. You can't have a suicide, you know, in three acts." And Fox went off with fresh laughter, leaving his exasperated companion without the power to reply.

As John Lawrence sat an hour later in Madame Thiebault's pretty drawing-room he tried to look at her through the lens of Fox's undazzled eyes. But the effort was vain. The gay smile, the level brows, the deep intoxicating eyes, the quick and daring wit of Madame Thiebault carried him away. On a footstool beside her sat her child, an angel-faced girl of four or five, and the child, Lawrence felt—in some dim, illogical way—served to accredit the mother. It give her in her lover's eyes a touch of gracious womanliness. It even seemed to put round her life a halo of innocence. And Fox was right. At bottom Lawrence had the stubborn domestic instinct natural to his English blood, and the unconscious child seemed to give to that instinct a reassuring pledge. There awoke in him an impulse of protecting tenderness, a touch of unselfish feeling, that mingled with the passion the mother's face kindled, and seemed to purify it.

As he sat there and looked at the two, black-browed John Lawrence, known and feared for his daring speculations and ruthless temper all over financial Europe, surrendered to the spell. The glance of Madame Thiebault's eyes ran through his blood like strong wine. His nerves thrilled to the cadences of her voice. Her keen and nimble wit played round his slower if stronger brain, as he half-ruefully confessed to himself, "like a swallow round a slow-winged crow."

Now, when a rich widower of forty finds himself,

to his own amazement, in love once more, strange things are possible. His youth seems to come back to him suddenly, and with almost intoxicating force. The strange, rich, half-forgotten ferment stirring in his blood frightens while it delights him. He is very apt to come to some dramatic, if half-ashamed, decision.

A month later he sat in the drawing-room of his brother, a hard-headed lawyer, as dry and as unsentimental as his own wig. He, too, like Fox—but with less tact—was trying to warn his brother against the too fascinating French widow.

"Robert," said John Lawrence to him at last, with a stubborn compression of his lips, "let Madame Thiebault alone."

Robert's wife, whose heart was jealous for the little motherless boy, just then in her charge, clung with feminine vehemence to the subject.

"You are too much at that Frenchwoman's house, John," she cried. "People are linking your names together."

John looked at her sternly. "Not another word," he said, "or we quarrel. Madame Thiebault is my wife."

"Oh, John," cried his sister-in-law with apparent irrelevance, "your poor little boy!" and the eyes of Mrs. Robert Lawrence shone with mingled pity and anger.

Yes, John Lawrence had stopped all remonstrances, if he had not silenced all criticisms, by a sudden and private marriage with Madame Thiebault.

CHAPTER II

THE WILL

THIS is in no sense a chronicle of John Lawrence the elder, and he may be dismissed from the narrative very briefly. A mystery, it was admitted by everybody, lay about Madame Thiebault; and marriage, even for her husband, did not dissipate the mystery. The marriage became public, and his wife took her place in his sober London house as its mistress, and filled it with a feverish gaiety—Lawrence's City friends called it "dissipation"—that smacked rather of Paris than of London. Her soft-footed major-domo took charge of the household. Old servants went, old habits were changed, strange guests crowded its stairways and ball-room; and its master, somehow, found himself, he grimly realised, a stranger under his own roof.

But at the end of two dazzling years the great house was suddenly shut up. It was announced that Mrs. Lawrence had gone to Paris; and rumour said she had set up a house as gay, or even gayer there; for her rich husband's money made all things possible. John's face wore an aspect so stern that it silenced all curious questions, but it could not prevent malicious speculations.

"He has found out," said his shrewd brother, "that

Madame Thiebault"—under that roof she was never called Mrs. Lawrence—"was nothing better than a secret agent for the French Government."

"He has found out," cried his wife, with a touch of more feminine malice, "that there never was any M. Thiebault."

Plainly, something tragical had taken place. Lawrence had discovered some stain in his wife's record or some flaw in her character that pricked his honour, and love was slain in the heart of the proud Englishman.

A month later, however, Lawrence himself went to Paris. "Urgent business," he briefly explained to his brother, took him there.

"That Frenchwoman will capture him again," said Robert's wife. "You men," she assured her husband, "are all such simpletons where a pretty woman is concerned."

Then after a brief interval came the news that John Lawrence was dying, and his brother was summoned in haste to his bedside.

The news from Paris was true. Some wave of fever-tainted air from the sewers of Paris had crept into the strong Englishman's blood as he drove in the diligence through its streets. The fever ran its deadly course so swiftly that the head of his Paris house, in alarm, insisted on sending for the doctor from the English Embassy. Dr. Graham did his best for the great London banker, the friend of Fox. But the sick man seemed to have no resisting power; hardly any wish, indeed, to live. His wife was the most light-handed of nurses, and flitted round her husband's bed with madonna-like face and air of angelic patience. But her husband's brow grew dark as she bent over him.

Jacques, her inscrutable major-domo, wore a countenance more mysterious than ever.

"Doctor," whispered the sick man one afternoon, "I must make a new will. It need only be a dozen lines, and I want you to write it out for me."

A Scotchman is always half a lawyer, and takes kindly to legal tasks, and Dr. Graham readily seized pen and paper, and took down the words as the sick man slowly dictated them. The will was brief. It gave a hundred pounds a year to madame, five thousand pounds to her little girl Denise, and the whole remaining estate to his boy John, with Robert Lawrence as sole executor. Dr. Graham was a plain-spoken Scotchman, and madame with her bright eyes, her soft-handed quickness as a nurse, and the resigned look as of an early Christian martyr on her face, had won his heart.

"Is that will quite fair to your wife?" he asked bluntly.

The sick man's face darkened at the question. He seemed about to speak, but checked the impulse.

"Do not sign it now," Dr. Graham went on. "Think over it. The will should be in duplicate," he added, with an amateur lawyer's love for unnecessary precautions. "Let Jacques make clean copies of it. I will come to-morrow morning, and then, if you still wish, it can be signed."

That night Dr. Graham wrote to Robert Lawrence. "Your brother is ill," the letter ran, "and is worse than he knows. He has drafted a will which I have told him is unfair to his wife. You had better come over. I leave for India almost at once, and your brother should have one of his own blood at his side."

The next day Dr. Graham found his patient worse,

but obstinately bent on completing his will. He was plainly, indeed, adding a new flame to the fever in his blood by fretting over the business. Jacques was summoned. He brought the paper he had prepared, opened it, and in obedience to a whisper from the sick man began to read it. Then a gesture from the sick-bed stopped him.

"Do you read it, doctor," said Lawrence, as if some strange and sudden suspicion seized him.

A deeper shadow crept over the dark face of the major-domo, and he drew back the hand that held the will; but after a moment's hesitation he gave the paper to the doctor, who read it aloud. The sick man was propped up with pillows; the pen shook so much in his trembling fingers as he leaned forward to sign that the ink fell from it in a broad splash on the will. But with an effort Lawrence steadied himself and scrawled his signature. Then a spasm of pain seized him, his face went deathly white. Dr. Graham was watching him keenly; he caught the paper as it fell from his fingers, thrust it into the major-domo's hands, and bent all his energies to the care of the sick man.

The attack slowly passed away. "Have you witnessed the will, doctor?" the patient whispered presently. Jacques was summoned again, and after some delay came into the room with the document. Its condition showed that as the doctor caught the will from the sick man's hand, his thumb had touched the wet blot of ink. He was a man of neat habits, and he looked ruefully at the black smear on the white paper.

"I have spoiled it," he said hesitatingly, "but there is no time, I suppose, to prepare a new one."

"Sign it," whispered the sick man impatiently.

Dr. Graham wrote his signature, Jacques signed as the second witness.

"Doctor," whispered Lawrence, pointing to the will, "put that in an envelope. Now seal it and endorse it. Keep it in the safe at the Embassy till you put it in my brother's hands."

"Where is the duplicate?" Dr. Graham asked Jacques.

"It is of no use," answered the major-domo. "Shall I not destroy it?"

"No. Give it to me."

With a certain odd hesitation the major-domo handed him the sheet, and the doctor put it, with Scottish prudence, in the breast-pocket of his coat.

"If the sick man grows stronger he may still wish his will to be in duplicate," he explained, "and so the copy is worth preserving."

When Robert Lawrence arrived his brother was unconscious. Dr. Graham declared he could do no more for the dying man, and he was impatient to start. "My ship," he said, "sails for India in a week, and I must start for England."

He told the story of the will; and, going with Robert Lawrence to the Embassy, put the document into his hands. Robert Lawrence examined the envelope with a lawyer's care.

"When you read it," said Dr. Graham, "you will see that it is not a very fair will. But Mr. Lawrence was perfectly conscious when he signed it, and it is what he meant it to be."

The next day Graham left Paris; two days afterwards John Lawrence died. He recovered consciousness for a few moments. The black mists of death

seemed to lift, and a light came to his eyes as he saw his brother's face bending over him.

"Take care of Jack," he whispered.

When the funeral was over, the will was opened and read; the widow sat with pensive and martyr-like face listening to the brief sentences. The figures were as Lawrence had dictated to Dr. Graham, but the names were strangely shifted. Denise still had her five thousand pounds, to the dead man's boy an annuity of one hundred pounds was left; the whole of the great estate went to the widow, and she was made sole executrix.

"Graham said the will was unfair to the wife," reflected the puzzled lawyer; "but he must have meant the boy. It's the boy who is robbed. That Frenchwoman," he added, with an expletive, "has beaten us after all. Poor little beggar," he went on, as he looked meditatively at the little desolate figure of the lad, now motherless and fatherless; "and he is at the mercy of that woman and her major-domo." He would have carried him off to London, but the step-mother was the boy's legal guardian, and, it was plain, held keenly to her rights. Women, however, are not legally minded; and Robert Lawrence knew that this circumstance would be held by his wife to be a quite inadequate reason for leaving the little fellow to the mercy of "that Frenchwoman."

The business of administering the English estate was slow, and Robert Lawrence did nothing to facilitate the process. He interposed, indeed, as many delays as possible. His wife vehemently urged him to dispute the will on the ground of undue influence, or any other ground he pleased. Any plea, in her indignant eyes,

was good enough for objecting to a will which not only robbed the little orphaned lad, but left him in the hands of the guilty step-mother who had robbed him. "An English judge," said the angry lady, "would not be worth his own wig who gave effect to a will so wicked." The assets in Paris were of a more easily liquefied sort, and Madame Laurente—as she now called herself—readily got possession of them.

Presently the Lawrences in London learned that the boy had been sent to the royal military college at Brienne, one of several recently founded. The military schools at Paris and La Flèche were notoriously lax. The new schools were to be of a sterner sort, and to secure that end were put under monkish rule. That at Brienne was controlled by the Order of St. Benedict. It was a school of one hundred and twenty pupils, half of them free, on the nomination of the King; the remainder paid a modest amount per year. The rule was that they entered at ten years of age, and on production of a certificate of birth. Young Lawrence was over that age, his name and birth were English; but money in the Paris of that day could work miracles. "John Lawrence" was changed into "Jean Laurente;" and thus disguised under a French label, the son of the dead English banker wore the uniform and lived the life of a cadet at the most famous of French military schools.

CHAPTER III

AT BRIENNE

It was a late September afternoon in the year 1784. The slanting rays of the sun poured in white flame through the archway into the great court of the military school at Brienne, and burned on its white pavement; but shadows black and cool filled the low colonnade that ran round three sides of it. From one angle of the colonnade there floated out on the drowsy afternoon air a clamour of youthful voices rising and falling in pulses of anger. The trained ear could distinguish the liquid accents of the South, the deeper tones of Brittany and of the West, the hard and nasal tones of Eastern France; but all were shrill with wrath.

A boy wearing his coat turned inside out—a token of offended discipline and its penalty—stood in the middle of the court and watched the tumult in the shadowy angle. He was for the moment an outcast from his comrades, and could only look on the scene from a distance with eager, regretful eyes. From a window in the steep roof above, on the opposite side of the square, a Benedictine monk, one of the college Fathers, looked down with an air of detached interest, a smile on his fat and inexpressive features. It was "a row amongst

the boys," a common incident in a school where monks taught soldiers, discipline was lax, and rebellion chronic.

The sound of angry voices rose suddenly to a shout, and the lad with the turned coat, drawn by an attraction he could not resist, ran towards the crowd of struggling figures from which the clamour came. They were all lads under fifteen, but looked like dwarfed men, for they wore the costume of men—cocked hats, breeches with gray or black stockings, coats without lapels that buttoned at the neck and ran back in a long curve to the tail, revealing vests (with deep pockets) that stretched to the hips. These were the soldiers of to-morrow, and they wore a uniform borrowed from the grenadiers of Fontenoy and Louis XIV.

It was a crowd that effervesced with French rage—a very noisy variety of anger. The queer little military figures shifted their places continually, gyrating in eddies of fury. Their faces were white with anger. They gesticulated like soldiers in the charge. A crowd of British boys at an equal temperature would have been resolved into a mere whirlwind of battle. Blows would have taken the place of epithets. There would have been a general fray, from which they would have emerged battered and breathless, but with good temper restored and the cause of the fight forgotten. But these were French boys, with shrill speech as the chief vehicle of their wrath; and certainly the speech was very shrill, and rose every moment still higher.

A dark-complexioned lad with Italian features was the object on which so much fury was being expended. His brow was black with scornful anger, his eyes

gleamed like sword-blades. He was a queer bundle of facial and physical discords. His head was too big for his shoulders. His face was too old for his years. It was the face of a man on the shoulders of a boy. His legs were ridiculously thin for the frame they supported. A hundred shrill epithets were being emptied on him. "Corsican" was the phrase used oftenest; but "big head," "spindleshanks," "straw on nose," were also used.

"*Paille au nez.*" Yes, the rigid set of the head, the scornful tilt of the uplifted chin, *did* suggest one who was balancing a straw on his nose. But a glance at the deep-set, wrathful eyes, the menacing lines of the face—a boy's face with no hint of boyish softness—showed that their owner was thinking of something else at the moment than the business of balancing straws. Yet, in schoolboy vernacular, "*Paille au nez*" sufficiently resembled "Napolione," the name of the lad with the Corsican face; a name which, slightly altered, was destined to send its vibrations round the world.

The anger fermenting in the boyish crowd was trivial compared with the wrath that glowed darkly in the eyes of the Corsican lad; and the look of deadly menace on those frowning brows, and of power behind the menace, sent every now and again a curious chill through the noisy crowd. But the angry lads in the shady colonnade at Brienne that afternoon had no hint of the stage of tremendous events on which their victim was about to step. They saw only a sulky and unpopular lad who, in some way, had affronted them all; who was a Corsican—that is to say, a foreigner; who was poor, and had no manners, and who pronounced his

"c's" like "g's"—all of them deadly offences in the code of schoolboy ethics.

The clamour of voices grew steadily in volume. One tall lad named Chambon thrust his jeering face close to the uptilted chin of "*Paille au nez*," and shouted some mortal insult. The dark, eagle face of the Corsican went white—the white of deadly anger—and he struck at his tormentor, not in English fashion from the shoulder, but as if thrusting with a small sword; and in a moment a dozen pairs of hands were clutching at him and striking him. His coat was rent half off his back, he was bareheaded and dishevelled.

The lad in the court had watched the scene with disgusted eyes. "The rats," he said softly to himself; then added, in English, "The curs! A dozen to one!" Then, forgetting his turned coat and his sentence of isolation from his comrades, he ran into the fray. He plainly knew better how to use his fists than did his opponents. The ring of boys striking at their victim was broken by his attack, a couple of the assailants were knocked down, and the lad with the reversed coat, his face suddenly bright with the joy of combat, stood beside the Corsican.

"They are cowards," he said; "and," he added cheerfully, as he stood with his comrade, their backs against a pillar of the colonnade, "we'll make it rough for them."

The Corsican made no reply, and offered no thanks. With black, unchanging face he steadily watched the little crowd. If looks could have killed, the death-rate at the military school at Brienne that afternoon would have gone up to an alarming height. The

interference of the lad with the turned coat added fuel to the human conflagration.

"Cursed Englander!" cried the tall lad Chambon; and a score of shrill voices took up the cry. Then the crowd became less noisy but much more dangerous. The Corsican still stood chin in air and murder in his eyes; but the other lad fought with vigour and with an oddly cheerful face, and the slender-chested French lads went down before him one after another. But suddenly a stone came whizzing through the air; it struck him on the bare white brow, and left a red splash of blood. Another stone struck the Corsican lad on the shoulder, but he might have been a figure of wood for all the effect it had upon him. Anger held him rigid, with his chin at a yet more defiant angle. The stones were now flying fast; one crashed into the window above the heads of the crowd.

There was the quick sound of hastening sandalled feet, the swish of robes.

"Father Berton!" cried one of the lads in tones of warning, and at the word the crowd scattered and fled.

A Benedictine monk, tall, gaunt, and stern of face, came swiftly along the colonnade; another monk followed him, red-faced and panting. The Benedictine looked coldly at the two lads who remained.

"Another disgraceful squabble, Napolione. You shame his Majesty's bounty.—As for you, Laurente," said the monk, turning to the younger lad, with angry dislike in every line of his gaunt face, "you come of a race of savages, and you have the habits of a savage. You disgrace the school. You are a dishonour to the coat you wear."

"I don't want to wear the coat," said the lad

defiantly. "And we were attacked. We didn't break the window."

The Corsican lad was obstinately silent.

"General Keralio has recommended you for transfer to Paris," said Father Berton to Napolione; "but" ——and the pause was significant, while the thin lips grew bitter.

The elder monk continued for a moment to look with frosty eyes at the two lads. "Father Leyrault," he said, "take them to No. 10." Then he paused and reflected. He would not give the two lads the solace of companionship; he had a monkish belief in the virtues of solitude.

"No; let Napolione be in No. 10 by himself.—You, Laurente," he added, turning to the English boy, "go to your own room."

"But," said the English lad stubbornly, "we were attacked; we were only defending ourselves."

"Were *you* attacked?" asked Father Berton coldly.

"No, but the whole crowd was attacking *him*," and Laurente pointed to his silent comrade.

The two lads were marched off, with Father Leyrault walking majestically behind them.

"You'll lose your commission, Napolione," whispered the English lad. "What a shame!"

From an angle of the building, as they passed along, peeped a line of grinning and triumphant faces. A hum of whispered jeers pursued them; it brought a touch of angry red into the cheeks of Laurente. The dark face of the Corsican betrayed no consciousness; but he heard, and his hand went suddenly to his side as though to grasp a sword. No sword hung there; but a light almost more menacing than the gleam of a

sword was in his eyes. The fierce look—that had a point of flame in it like a tiny flake of molten steel—scorched the grinning crowd of boys into a sudden and half-disquieted silence. They shrank back as from the actual thrust of naked steel.

CHAPTER IV

COMRADESHIP

THE long September twilight had died away, the hum of the school had ceased. Silence lay on the great building under whose steep roofs a small army of lads was being trained, as they imagined, to serve Louis XVI., but in reality for fiercer battlefields than French soldiers had ever yet known. Jean Laurente, as he was called, sat in his room sleepless and fretting. He had listened to the tramp of feet as the cadets passed along the echoing passage to their dormitories. Sleep and silence seemed to envelop Brienne; but the English boy was thinking of his room-mate in No. 10.

"It is a shame," he muttered to himself, again and again. The instinct of comradeship, the resentment kindled by injustice, and a certain fire of hero-worship which burned in him towards the dark-faced Corsican kept him awake. He pictured "*Paille au nez*," with his fierce eyes, sitting in the room which served as a prison. He was certain that his comrade would not sleep, and with a boy's unreasoning comradeship he felt he must speak to him and do something to help him.

He was himself a prisoner; but his adroit fingers, with the help of a pocket-knife, slipped back the bolt of the door with an ease which showed the process was familiar. He stepped softly across the threshold of his room and looked down the blackness of the long corridor. No sound came along it, and with barefooted noiselessness he crept through its gloom.

Midway, the great stairs running down to the main entrance broke the line of the corridor; and as the lad stood for a moment at its head he caught a faint sound that sent a thrill along his nerves. He listened and watched. Presently, two figures became for a moment visible as they flitted across the light that fell from the window above the great door. The long sloping shoulders of one figure suggested Chambon, but in a moment it melted in the darkness. Something was afoot, some freak of impish mischief, some breach of discipline. Jean listened, but no fresh sound crept through the gloom, and he stole on until he reached the door of No. 10. He scratched on it softly to attract the attention of the prisoner, and then with patient slowness drew back the heavy bolt. The metallic creak seemed to run, a thread of penetrating sound, down the corridor; but Laurente persevered till the heavy door swung open. He whispered his comrade's name, and the next instant felt himself grasped by the hot and nervous hands of the Corsican. For a space the two lads stood listening.

"Why did you come?" asked Napolione at last.

"I thought," said the other, a little chilled by the question, "you would be lonely."

"No, I have my thoughts for company," and he laughed softly and oddly.

"They are treating you shamefully," said Laurente, "and why? Because you are a Corsican."

"Yes; and you because you are English. I hate these French," he added in a fierce whisper, "and I will do them all the harm I can."

"Will they let you go to Paris?"

"They do not want to keep me here, and the others hate me only the more because M. de Keralio declared I should be one of the first to go. But I *shall* go," he said with energy. "It is fate. They cannot stop me. I love Corsica, and sometimes I picture myself there. But Paris is the field! Paris is the world!"

The darkness seemed to thaw his reticence, and the Corsican lad went on to talk of his dreams, talking more to himself, indeed, than to the English lad listening.

He used broken phrases, as if half reluctant to talk of his ambitions and hopes—hopes and ambitions extravagant enough for a lad sitting in the darkness of a punishment-cell, but which were destined to fall far short of the amazing reality. Presently he stopped, and silence fell on the two lads.

"Get back, Jean," the Corsican at last whispered. "The Fathers have quick ears. If they found you here it would be worse for me." And he pushed the other lad out, saying, "I will take no risk. I won't give them any new excuse for injuring me."

Jean felt sore at being dismissed in this abrupt fashion; but the stronger will of his comrade prevailed. He slowly and carefully worked back the bolt into its socket, and then made his way through the darkness to his own room.

As he went his foot struck against some rustling

object on the floor. He stooped and picked it up. It was a book; and, holding it in his hand, he went on his way. A deeper shadow seemed to lie within the doorway of his room as he came near it, and the boy hesitated before he stepped into its darkness.

While he still paused, a strong hand seized him, and Father Leyrault's voice demanded sternly, "Where have you been? Why are you out of your room?"

Jean hesitated. To tell would injure Napolione.

"I have been down the corridor," he said sullenly.

"But where? Who was your comrade? Into whose room have you been?"

The English lad was obstinately silent. The angry Father shook him furiously, but he could shake no answer out of the boy's stubborn lips.

"This will be inquired into in the morning," he said at last; "then everything must come out," and he locked the door with angry emphasis, leaving the lad a prisoner.

In the morning Jean listened with disquieted ears to the familiar sound of the awakening school, the clang of the bell that called the lads to morning service in the school chapel, the tramp of their feet as they passed along the corridor. Presently, and much sooner than he expected, came the sound of returning feet. A note of unusual excitement was in the boys' voices as they went past. A little later, the door of the room opened, and Father Berton with Father Leyrault entered. They looked at the lad with a silent and questioning sternness, at which Jean's heart, in spite of himself, sank.

"Your wicked crime is known," began Father Berton.

Jean stared with uncomprehending eyes.

"You come," said the monk, "of a heretic race; but even a heretic might have shrunk from a deed so blasphemous." And the two monks crossed themselves piously.

"What have I done?" asked Jean, in awe-stricken accents.

"You know," replied Father Berton curtly, "and so do we." And with an imperious gesture he led the astonished boy from the room. They took him along the corridor, and thrust him without further explanation into the room which served as a prison, where Napolione sat.

Here Jean learned the details of the crime of which he was accused. Two figures, one of Benedict Nursia the founder of the Order, and one of Benedict of Aniane its restorer, stood on either side of the door of the school chapel. In the night some wicked hands had wrought a strange transformation in the appearance of the two saints. A cocked hat set at a rakish angle had taken the place of the nimbus on the head of the elder Benedict. A fierce moustache adorned his lip, an old musket was substituted for the cross in his hands. The ascetic of the fifth century was transformed into a drunken-looking grenadier of the eighteenth century. The twin figure of the restorer of the Order had undergone a still more astonishing restoration. His saintly, if wooden, face was painted into the resemblance of a clown. A wooden pipe was thrust into his mouth, a ragged coat hung over his shoulders.

Father Bibron, who opened the door of the chapel, was old and unobservant, and had failed to discover the sacrilegious act; but the procession of lads, as they

came to the chapel door, saw it. They even seemed to look for it; and a hundred grinning faces and delighted gestures greeted the strange spectacle offered by the two ill-used saints. So great was the excitement that the cadets had at last been ordered back to their rooms. Here was an act of the blackest sacrilege, and, in monkish logic, who could be the guilty author of it but the English lad?

Jean told Napolione how he had been detected by Father Leyrault on returning to his room.

"That will convict you," said the other lad with curious indifference.

Jean went on to describe the two figures he had dimly seen on the stairs, and how one resembled Chambon. On his way back to his room he had picked up a school-book, in which, when he examined it, he found Chambon's name written. As he listened, the dark face of the Corsican lad flushed, his eyes grew eager.

"Tell that to the Fathers. It will ruin him."

"But I am not sure that it was Chambon I saw; and perhaps he dropped the book in the corridor as he went to his room."

"But say it was Chambon, whether you are sure or not. Why should you spare him? It is a chance against your enemy."

It was the Corsican blood in Napolione that was speaking!

"I could not," said Jean obstinately; "it would be mean to tell."

"It is always right to stab an enemy," replied Napolione, with the fierce ethics natural to his blood. "Tell the story," he went on vehemently, "it is your chance to destroy him."

But Jean shook his head obstinately. It was not merely the schoolboy's instinctive dislike to "tell" which restrained him. There was unconsciously a deeper feeling behind that shake of his head. The touch of a dead mother's hand kept his conscience tender, and he would not lie either to escape an injury or to revenge a wrong. His companion looked at him with scornful eyes. He plainly thought it was weakness to hesitate, and he despised the English lad for the weakness. The two lads, in a word, represented unlike schools of thought, and were governed by different ideals.

"To let an enemy escape when you can destroy him," said the Corsican fiercely, "is folly."

Jean's obstinate silence increased his wrath.

"You are stupid," Napolione went on, with cold distinctness, as though closing the incident, and explaining it. "You cannot learn. You will never make an officer. You must keep a shop."

Yes, poor Jean's "stupidity" was a byword at Brienne; and the English lad himself neither doubted the fact nor resented it. The nimble-witted French boys, who beat him in every lesson, made him their constant butt, a process which Jean bore with stubborn and unresisting patience. A slow stubbornness, indeed, was his characteristic. His very anger, when kindled, was of the slow but unquenchable sort. When once kindled, however, it outlasted the effervescing resentments of the other lads, and made him, at least, a fighter to be dreaded. His stubbornness extended to his memory. He did not learn quickly, but what he once learned he never forgot; and wiser teachers than the Fathers at Brienne might have seen in that

circumstance some gleam of promise. He had, moreover, a dogged and undiplomatic honesty. He could not lie adroitly, or, for the matter of that, lie at all.

An unpopular youth, he had only one friend—the Corsican, and he endured poor Jean's affection rather than returned it. And now the English lad's one friend had turned upon him.

CHAPTER V

TRIAL AND SENTENCE

AT noon next day the council that governed the school met. Father Berton was its head; General Keralio the inspector, a white-haired, fiercely moustached veteran, sat at his side. The teachers—monks for the most part, heavy of face and gross in body—sat round the table. Jean was brought in, and every man at the table regarded him with stony eyes. It was clear he had no friend there. He came of alien blood, he was hopelessly stupid, his very presence in the college was a breach of its constitution. Then he was a heretic, and he had done a deed which affronted his monkish teachers at their most sensitive point. It was an offence not only against discipline but against religion. He had made ridiculous the two most venerated figures in their Order.

Father Leyrault told his tale. He had detected the lad, after midnight, creeping back to his room in the darkness with the air of one who returned from the commission of a crime. When questioned he had refused to say where he had been. His silence was a confession of guilt. What needed concealment must necessarily be a wickedness.

"Tell me why you left your room?" said the inspector; and something in the soldierly directness of the question and the straightforward glance of the speaker's eyes changed Jean's feelings. He suddenly resolved to speak. It could not harm his comrade.

"I went to have a talk with Napolione. I thought he would be miserable in No. 10."

"And had you a talk with him?"

"Yes."

"How long were you with him?"

"More than an hour."

Father Berton smiled incredulously, but the inspector was just-minded.

"Let us hear," he said, "whether the other lad confirms this."

Napolione was sent for, and stood—square-browed, dark-featured, with a suggestion of gloomy power in every line of his face—before the council.

"Did the cadet Laurente come to your room last night?" asked the inspector briefly.

"No, sir."

"He says he had been an hour there."

Napolione looked calmly at Jean, and was silent for a moment. Something in his look held the whole group breathless. The Corsican lad's eyes were as frosty as the Alps with all their snows.

"He lies, sir," he said with clear and steady voice. "No one came to me."

The twang of Corsican patois was yet in his speech; but the use of "g's" for "c's" only made his words more emphatic. The commanding face, the composed look, the high, deliberate voice, all carried conviction with them. Jean gazed and listened in bewilderment.

This was his chum! It was through trying to help him he had fallen into trouble; and now his one comrade was destroying him with a lie, and without a touch of remorse.

The two cadets were sent back to No. 10, and the little group on the daïs consulted together.

"Who is Laurente, and why is he called '*L'Anglais*'?" asked M. de Keralio.

"He is a paying student," replied Father Berton; "his guardian is a Madame Laurente, who resides in Paris, and is well known. The other lads call him '*L'Anglais*' because of his English speech and ways, and there is no doubt his place in Brienne is the result of a fraud. He claims that his father was English. He is always fighting, always under punishment, and he is very stupid. And," added Father Berton in a tone of pious horror, "he is a Protestant. No one but a Protestant would ill-use the figure of a saint."

"I suspect, father, you do not know what French boys are capable of," replied the inspector with a dry, brief smile. "There is no direct evidence against Laurente, but he lies, no doubt, in his tale of visiting Napolione. And why should he lie unless he had something to conceal? Let him be dismissed from the school and sent back to his guardian. As for the Corsican," added the old soldier, "let him go to Paris." And, taking his pen, he wrote the necessary order.

Meanwhile the two lads sat looking at each other in No. 10. Napolione was the least disturbed of the two.

"Did you expect me to ruin myself?" he asked coolly in reply to the unspoken reproach of the other's eyes. "I want to go to Paris, for Brienne is purgatory;

and had I agreed with your tale it would have cost me my nomination. Why should I commit suicide out of mere sentiment?"

"But you lied," said Jean with characteristic directness.

The other lad shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"You made me out a liar," added the English lad.

"It is every one for himself at such times, my poor Jean. What would you? Was I to ruin myself?" asked the Corsican, in unanswerable tones, and with a note of cold anger in his voice. "You are unreasonable." Then, with uptilted chin, he asked, "What is truth, or what is friendship? I owe nothing but to myself." And poor Jean almost felt as if he were the criminal, and that truth and comradeship were crimes.

"I must go to Paris," Napolione repeated as he paced the room to and fro. "My career lies there. Why should I sacrifice it? A lie is only one set of syllables instead of another. What are truth and falsehood but tools; and a wise man uses either of them as it suits his purpose."

So calm, not to say convincing, was the lad's speech, and so unrebuked his air, that Jean felt all his moral landmarks were shifting.

"They will expel you," said Napolione, in a matter-of-fact tone, "but that is no injury to you. Why should you be a French officer when, for all your French name, you have English blood in your veins? Then you are stupid. You will never make a career. As for me," continued Napolione, "I shall rise, and some day," he added with a magnificent gesture, "I will help you."

"You might have helped me to-day," Jean protested, "if you had only spoken the truth."

"Why should I?" asked the other lad in final tones. "You are unreasonable."

Jean could only look at his comrade helplessly. That glacier-like selfishness froze him till the fire of anger itself was quenched.

M. de Keralio meanwhile had written that description of the Corsican lad which has since become historic: "M. de Bonaparte, born August 15, 1769; height, 4 ft. 10 in. 10 lines [about 5 ft. 3 in. English]; excellent health, docile disposition, mild, straightforward, thoughtful. . . . This boy would make an excellent sailor; deserves to be admitted to the school in Paris."

The old soldier's eyes had certainly lost their vision when he wrote this description of the lad who stood before him. "Docile, mild, straightforward!" These were exactly the qualities he did *not* possess. Father Berton's endorsement was written in strangely different terms: "Character masterful, imperious, and headstrong." The monk read "*Paille au nez*" better than did the soldier.

A fortnight later Napolione left for Paris, being one of four cadets nominated to enter the military school there. Jean had already left Brienne. He had been formally expelled as being guilty of "disgraceful conduct;" and his gloomy face as the journey began hinted at the reception he expected in Paris.

It was late in the day when the diligence started. The black, level shadows cast by the setting sun ran before the plodding horses, the wind scuffled drearily in the tree-tops, and the horizon before them, darkening

into night, was made blacker by a gathering storm. The shivering, friendless lad perched high beside the driver felt in some dim, vague way that his boyish life was as cheerless as the landscape about him and the black skies before him.

CHAPTER VI

IN PARIS

As the diligence drove through the gate into Paris it was a very tired youth who stared with very tired eyes at the scene before him. The Paris of 1784 was a city with a girdle of lofty walls pierced with gates. The wall, it is true, was intended not so much to keep out a foreign enemy as to prevent the smuggling of uncustomed goods. It was a collectors' barrier, and every street that pierced it was crossed by a palisade, with an opening to admit one vehicle at a time and a sort of sentry-box for the tax-collector. Paris, in a word, was bound in a ribbon of stone, with ninety-six of such gates for eyelet-holes.

The diligence entered by the Rue Montreuil. It was November, and the fast-darkening gloom of the winter evening lay on the foul and narrow streets—a gloom that deepened into night under the shadow of the beetling houses, with their projecting upper stories, irregular gables, and huge creaking signboards. The street was a mere stony gutter, lowest at the centre. Footpaths were not yet invented; and Jean wondered at the round clumsy pillars that at irregular intervals projected from the sides of the houses. *Bornes* the

friendly driver told him they were named, and he guessed they were intended to protect the foot-passengers from being crushed by the passing vehicles against the walls.

The shop windows were low. Openings at the level of the streets led into dark cellars, round which dirty children played, and into which, as the wheels of the diligence rattled by too closely, they disappeared like frightened rabbits. Every now and again they passed a shop from which trickled across the wet stones little streams of blood. These were butchers' shops; and thus, as if in dreadful and unconscious prophecy, the streets of the Paris of that day were scribbled with hieroglyphics of blood.

As the diligence drove westward Jean recognized some of the more famous buildings. Down a narrow, crooked street to the left he caught a glimpse of the towers of Notre Dame. A sudden curve of houses rising above the mosaic of roofs showed where the Pont Neuf stood. Near it, a great stone horse and its rider marked where the Pont Royal crossed the Seine. Madame Laurente's house was in the Rue de la Grenelle, a side street opening into the Rue St. Honore, and was only reached through a tangle of narrow alleys and filthy houses. The house stood back discreetly from the street, and showed in the dim twilight a square of blackness, in which the lighted windows shone like eyes.

The major-domo—M. Duclos, as he was now called—met Jean as he entered, and somehow a chill ran through the boy's blood as he caught a glimpse of that dark face with its frosty eyes and look of mystery.

Madame was entertaining to-night, he told Jean.

"She will see you to-morrow. You must hide yourself, or I will hide you; for it will not add to her pleasure to see you. Did you expect," he asked quietly, in answer to Jean's disappointed look, "to step from the punishment-cell at Brienne to madame's drawing-room?"

Jean was too tired and wretched to protest against such a reception, or even to resent it. The major-domo's accusing eyes chilled him. They gave him a deeper sense than ever that he was a criminal. He was led, with something of the air of a detected thief about him, up the narrow stairs to a little dark room high in the roof. He sat there, tired and cold, till a mingled tempest of despair and anger awoke in him. He was under what was his father's roof, and he sat hungry, neglected, forgotten.

Presently the sound of many feet, the murmur of voices broken now and again by a merry tinkle of laughter, stole up to him. Jean opened the door of his room, crept across the dark corridor to the head of the stairs, and looked down. Madame was sweeping down the stairs, a figure of grace. He saw the gleam of her white shoulders, the sparkle of jewels. Her voice rose to where Jean stood, inexpressibly soft and sweet. She lifted her eyes to the tall figure of the gentleman at her side, and Jean saw the flash of her white teeth as she smiled. The tired, hungry, unwelcome boy leaning over the stairs looked with envying eyes at the graceful figure below him, a foam of lace and silk, out of which rose the bright upturned face, from which the eyes shone like stars.

As Jean looked, a little girl ran with swift pursuing feet down the stairs. It was Denise, Jean's

playmate during the two years of his father's marriage. Jean leaned over the balustrade and called to her; but the swift figure had vanished, and he stood in the darkness whispering her name over and over again: "Denise! Denise!" His heart ached for companionship.

He crept back to his room, and, broken with fatigue, flung himself on the bed and slept. But through the chamber of his dreams the dark features of the major-domo, the upturned face with starry eyes of madame, and the slender, swift little figure of Denise chased each other.

When Jean awoke it was still night, the rain was beating on the little attic window, and the roof shook to the harsh November wind. He was hungry, cold, unwashed. Sitting in the gloom of the cheerless room, he felt as if he were naked to the wild night. Its blackness, shaken with storm, lay on his imagination and half-froze, half-terrified it.

Every one seemed to have forgotten him. He tried the door, but it was locked. The chilly hours went by, the cold gray dawn came and grew to a noon as gray, and still there was no sound of a coming footfall. At last, pricked with hunger, the boy grew desperate. He commenced to beat furiously on the door. For long he beat in vain. Then a footstep—deliberate and unhurrying—drew near his door and paused. Somehow Jean knew it was the major-domo, and he pictured the frosty eyes, with some unread and deadly purpose lurking in them, and for a moment he was chilled with fear. Then his courage, hot with the fire of anger, awoke again. He thumped the door more furiously than before, but the steps passed away with a leisurely

deliberation which set the boy's wrath in a fresh flame.

If the major-domo meant to tame him with hunger the plan was a mistake. Jean's spirit grew fierce. He looked round the room. In the fireplace was an iron fire-dog on which a pair of tongs leaned. He seized the fire-dog, lifted it in his vigorous young arms, and dashed it on the panel of the door. He repeated the performance again and again until the panel began to yield. Then suddenly the door opened. The major-domo stood there.

"You begin well," he said coldly. "This is your first morning, and you are breaking madame's doors."

Jean was a sufficiently desperate figure. His face was dirty, his hair stood up defiantly, the fire-dog was in his hand, the broken door bore the signature of his fury. He scorned to say he was hungry.

"I was locked in," he said sullenly.

"Come," replied the major-domo, "madame will see you. You may keep your weapon," he added with a satirical smile.

Jean felt himself like some outcast as, with dirty boots, blackened hands, and sulky brow, he entered madame's dainty sitting-room. She looked at him. The bright eyes were hard beneath the level brows.

"*Ah, quel bête!*" she said softly.

The boy caught the words and flushed; his hands instinctively gripped the unlucky fire-dog with an impulse of anger, his lips grew stubbornly silent.

The major-domo told his story. He had thought it prudent to lock the lad in his room, and in the morning he had found him breaking the panels of the door with the fire-dog which he still grasped in his soiled hands.

Jean had no defence to offer. He had a boy's gift for sulky and inarticulate anger. A look which Jean could not understand was in madame's dark eyes as they rested on the lad's figure. Was it pity, or hate, or remorse, or a combination of all these emotions? Then she seemed to dismiss him with an impatient gesture out of her life.

"Do as you will with him. Let him live with the servants, or anywhere else; only keep him out of my sight."

Jean felt the blood run in a fresh wave of anger through his veins. It was his father's house, where he had once lived like a prince, with every whim gratified. Now he was dismissed to the company of the servants. A touch of gentleness in madame's voice, a glance of kindness from her beautiful eyes would have melted the boy and made him her slave. But the strange looks which passed betwixt madame and her major-domo froze him. The cold dislike in her eyes awoke in him a passion of bitter feeling.

Just then there was a sound of soft, light feet which set the boy's nerves tingling with a new sensation. It was Denise.

She ran to her mother's side with a merry laugh, then she turned; her quick young eyes dwelt wonderingly on the dirty figure of the boy, with the unhappy fire-dog still in his hands. "It is Jean!" she cried; and a flash of delight, mingled with wondering pity, lit up her face. In an instant her arms were about his neck, her warm lips were on his dirty cheeks.

Now, a boy does not enjoy being publicly kissed, and madame, with the major-domo, made a very

unsympathetic audience. Yet the voice, the touch of Denise overcame Jean.

"Denise," said her mother, with chilly deliberation, "you forget yourself. Jean is no company for you. He has disgraced himself, he has been cast out of Brienne. He has been only a night here, and look at him. He has begun to break down the doors of the house."

"Have you been a whole night here," asked Denise breathlessly, "and I did not know?"

Two pairs of rueful eyes questioned each other and read each other. There is a predetermined and eternal harmony which knits certain sounds together, and why should human hearts be less responsive than air-waves? Certainly some sudden, unreasoning, mystic affection that comprehended everything, and told everything, knitted together the boy and the girl. Denise was plucked away, and Jean was led mutinously into social exile; but the last look of his playmate haunted him. Her eyes shone like twin stars in the dark sky of the unfortunate boy's memory.

CHAPTER VII

PARIS EXPERIENCES

In the months of neglect and of humiliation which followed, Jean was in the house but formed no part of the household. It would be difficult to imagine a more lonely figure. Madame treated him as non-existent. The major-domo's eyes, when Jean crossed his path, dwelt on him with a brooding and unintelligible purpose which the lad fiercely resented, and yet more than half-feared. He was the butt and sport of the servants, fed with the contemptuous disregard with which a dog might be fed, and allowed to sit silent and forgotten whole days and nights in his lonely room. Years afterwards the memory of those days would flush Jean's face with anger.

Denise was in a convent school, but her rare visits to the mansion were gleams of dazzling sunshine, for she always found her way to him, sometimes stealing with dainty footfall to the door of his room, or lying in wait for him in the corridors. The touch of her soft little hand, the eager affection shining in her eyes, the pitiful comprehending smile on the sensitive lips, were to poor Jean glad and enduring memories, the only thing, indeed, that kept him from utter despair.

To escape menial tasks and companionships in the house the boy took to the streets, and rambled for whole days through the network of foul alleys which lay to the west of madame's house. Here, at least, he escaped that atmosphere of contempt which scorched him like a flame under madame's roof. He formed strange friendships with the gamins of the street, learned their *argot*, took part in their sports and enterprises.

Over the Paris of that day, it must be remembered —the Paris of 1786–90—the thunderstorm of the Revolution was gathering. In the debates of the clubs, in the songs and catchwords of the streets, in the very sports of the gamins, a strange ferment was stirring. The thrill of some great change beginning to sweep over the land stirred men's hearts everywhere as the energies of the coming spring stir the fibres of every tree in a forest. It gave new fervour to hate, new edge to discontent, new passion to hope. The streets effervesced with fiery debates. No scheme was too wild to find loud and eager advocates.

Jean rambled through the zone of slums that shut like a filthy girdle round the Tuileries. He knew every twist in the tangle of alleys which stretched from the Rue St. Honore to the Place du Carrousal. The gloomy lanes of the Cité—the foulest spot in Paris too deep in blackness for the sun to pierce, too narrow for cart to creep through—had an odd attraction for him. The network of cellars along the river-front—rat-holes in which, like filthy and half-starved rodents, a population of a hundred thousand people burrowed, flooded out with every rise of the river, was his familiar haunt.

Betwixt the wintry unkindness of madame's house and the foulness of Paris slums the poor lad oscillated in this fashion. If his character had been destroyed by the play of such evil forces, and he had disappeared, swallowed up of darkness, it would not have been strange. Perhaps M. Duclos hoped for this. It would have disposed of a possible claimant to madame's fortune. And madame herself silently consented to this. Jean's disappearance would have delivered her from a face that, in spite of herself, awoke a certain disquiet.

But somehow the lad survived. He kept the stubborn manliness which was the gift of his English blood. And he kept better things than even it—a hate of falsehood, a touch of boyish and unconscious piety—gifts to him from his dead mother. Her memory, the unfading vision of her face, the echo of her teaching, the sense of what would have pleased her and what grieved, acted as restraining forces. She had taught his conscience a tenderness and an authority which survived even the evil environment in which Jean now lived.

God interprets Himself to the human soul in many ways; and to Jean, as to many another English lad, his mother's face, remembered still in spite of death, became itself a sort of conscience. He saw right and wrong through his dead mother's eyes. His will took a more stubborn bent againt evil whenever he thought of her.

London, meanwhile, grew faint to Jean. A certain shame made him reluctant to write, and the occasional letters his aunt wrote to him M. Duclos took care never reached him. That mysterious gentleman, too,

contemplated with keen dislike the friendship betwixt Denise and Jean, and what he disliked was very apt to come to an uncomfortable end. The boy was always conscious of the darkened brow, the evil look of meditative dislike with which M. Duclos regarded him; but the frown grew darker, the glance more evil as it became clear that Denise's love for her comrade survived his disgrace, and even took a new and more tender glow from it.

Much of the political passion stirring in Paris eddied round Madame Laurente's house. The Girondist leaders were familiar figures in her salon; and, as the factions had not yet come to open war, the representatives of every shade of politics rubbed shoulders in madame's drawing-room. Jean, watching from his dark perch at the summit of the stairs, heard sometimes from the salon the deep, compelling voice of Mirabeau; and later that other great voice of the Revolution, resonant as the sound of a bell—an alarum bell, for choice—that of Danton. Danton's face, with its cinder-black eyebrows and features curiously flattened as though crushed, became familiar to him. M. Duclos had subterranean relationships with the darker and fiercer spirits in the political world of Paris, and sometimes representatives of the Left came to madame's salon. So Jean became familiar with Camille Desmoulins's voice of flute-like sweetness—a voice distilling gall in spite of its sweetness. He came to know the lifted face, the small pointed features, the compressed lips, the green, short-sighted eyes, the receding forehead of Robespierre, with his fixed and artificial smile, his nervously fluttering eyelids and bile-tinted complexion.

One day, as he rambled in the Palais Royal, Jean's eyes fell on an odd, undersized figure in the uniform of a sous lieutenant of artillery. The big head was out of proportion to the short body, the slender legs were thrust into boots so high and wide that their owner resembled Puss-in-Boots. But as this odd figure came near, the dark Italian features, with their tint as of dead gold, the frowning brow, the eyes out of which a challenging discontent looked, seemed curiously familiar. It was his Corsican comrade of Brienne, "*Paille au nez*," his chin a little higher in air, if possible, than ever.

With the impulse of frank comradeship, Jean ran forward to greet his friend, then stopped. The young officer had stopped too, and was contemplating with a look of angry astonishment the street gamin who, with eager face and outstretched hands, approached him. Then he recognized him.

"Ah, Jean," he said, looking at him from head to foot with a glance that made the lad freshly conscious of his shabby clothes, "you are, then, no soldier!"

This was clear enough, but the English lad found it hard to explain what he was. With the eager curiosity of youth, he plied his own Brienne companion with questions about his own doings.

Yes, Napolione had finished with the military school. He hated it, he declared with frowning emphasis. It was worse than Brienne. The other cadets were insolent, they were stupid, they were purse-proud. He had got his commission in the regiment of La Fere. He was to join it at Valence.

"It is a beginning," he said, "it is the first step. My destiny will declare itself."

Jean, with his blunt English common-sense, smiled at the thin-legged, short-bodied sous lieutenant who talked so confidently of his "destiny." His companion, with his uncanny swiftness of glance, saw the smile, read its meaning, and flashed out imperiously, "You smile! Nobody will smile at me ten years hence."

And Jean, looking at the piercing eyes, the commanding brow of the other, felt his smile fade. A compelling magnetism lurked in the eyes of this strange officer of artillery, something that made doubt or contradiction very difficult. "Destiny" and the young artillery officer, with his boots too absurdly big for his thin legs, did after all seem to be on surprisingly intimate terms with each other.

Napolione meanwhile was looking afresh at Jean. "You are unhappy," he said bluntly. "You are in disgrace still. But," he added, with a sudden and fierce gleam in his eyes, "why did you not make an end of Chambon? A word would have done it. He came on to Paris, and was more hateful than even in Brienne."

"But the word would have been a lie," said Jean stubbornly.

Napolione's gesture was magnificent. "A lie is sometimes a useful weapon. What soldier is ashamed of his bayonet?"

Jean shook his head, and the other grew scornful.

"*Mon ami*, I would help you. And the time will come," he added, with an upward tilt of his chin which reminded Jean of Brienne, "when I *can* help you. But you must be practical. What has put a gamin's blouse on your shoulders instead of a cadet's

coat? It is what you call truth. It is your simple-minded incapacity to use words as a swordsman uses his blade."

Jean went away from him feeling chilled and sore, yet fascinated afresh. His old Brienne comrade seemed to have forgotten that it was Jean's boyish loyalty to him which had spoiled his career. He had wasted on Jean no word of sympathy, yet the spell of his challenging eyes and his energy of purpose made the English lad feel towards him almost like a slave towards a master. He could give up everything to him—except his conscience. And it was precisely his conscience which was the point of divergence betwixt the two lads.

CHAPTER VIII

"THE RATS"

THE chief interests of Jean's life at this time lay in the friendships and enmities born of his street wanderings, and some of these were very odd. The Paris gamins of those days, when the great city was stirring through every lane and alley with the ferment of the coming revolution, were of a special type. The political passions of the day soaked through to even their dens. They had their clubs, their policies, their watchwords, their leaders, their wars with rival bands.

The dim and filthy regions which lay about the Tuileries were infested by a swarm of gamins organised into a band under the title of "The Rats." Jean's ramblings through their territory attracted their attention, and began to be watched with jealous eyes. One evening Jean was confronted by an odd figure in ragged dress and unwashed face, but with an air of strutting arrogance that contrasted absurdly with his rags.

"What are you doing here?" demanded this strange figure."

Jean stared at his questioner with silent wonder.

"I'm the Rat," said the ragged youth with an air of indescribable pride, "and this is my district. The

Rats do not love strangers and spies," and he glared fiercely at Jean.

There was something rodent-like in the slanting eyes and pointed chin of the Rat. Jean had noticed him before, and admired the speed and soft-footedness with which he could slip down some dark lane or cellar, and disappear. Jean's cool silence, even more than his steady eyes and his evident preparedness for battle, seemed to chill the Rat's ardour for instant combat, and with a gesture of menace, as though threatening open war, he disappeared down the nearest lane. But from that moment Jean found himself exposed to incessant onfalls and ambushes whenever he crossed the zone of streets betwixt madame's house and the Palais Royal. He lived the life of a hunted animal.

The Paris of that day, however, was subject to extraordinary changes in sentiment, changes marked by tropical fervour and rapidity. One morning the Rat suddenly presented himself to Jean's astonished eyes and made a partially successful attempt to fall on his neck and embrace him.

"*L'Anglais*," he cried, "England and France are sisters. England is free, and France will get rid of her kings and priests and set an example of freedom to the world."

Jean stared at the little ragged figure who talked in accents borrowed from some orator of the pavements, and evidently regarded himself as the representative of France and Jean as that of England, and was prepared to conclude a solemn league and covenant of peace on the spot.

England and all things English had for the moment become the rage in Paris. English costumes made

their appearance in every street, English habits were copied, English phrases became passwords, English carriages thronged the Champs-Elysées, English racers ridden by English jockeys contended for prizes at Longchamp. The very riders in the Boulevards wore English breeches and top-boots, and rose in their stirrups in what was believed to be the English fashion. The English Constitution was discovered to be the last word of political wisdom. Paris temporarily became Anglomaniac, and the new craze filtered through to the very gamins. This explains why the Rat attempted to fall on Jean's neck and announced an eternal brotherhood with him. The Paris of the gutters was mimicking the Paris of the clubs and the Boulevards.

Jean accepted the new terms of peace with the same cool philosophy which he had shown under the old conditions of war. But his league with the Rats introduced him to strange aspects of Paris life. The Rats of Jean's neighbourhood lived on terms of truceless strife with the organised gamins of the surrounding districts. Their days and nights were filled with traps, ambuscades, fierce sallies, feigned retreats, the cutting off of stragglers, the plunder of their enemies' supplies, etc. Jean was at first scorned by his new comrades for his apparent stupidity and jeered at for his clumsiness. But his unfailing coolness, his gift for straight hitting, and his mysterious faculty for fighting with serene cheerfulness against overwhelming odds aroused the wondering admiration of the Rat and the whole band.

In madame's house, as in the school at Brienne, a certain impassiveness lay on the boy's features like a mask. He seemed slow of wit and clumsy in body,

It was an unconscious and self-protective disguise. But in the companionships of the streets the mask slipped aside; he showed himself curiously alert and inventive. He never forgot a street through which he had once passed, a face he had once seen, a voice he had once heard. A faculty for command awoke in him.

The Rat himself could plan a campaign with much ingenuity, but when the moment of actual combat came his genius failed, he fell into the background. It was Jean who led the onfall or covered the retreat, or singled out the captain of the hostile force in combat and seldom failed to overthrow him. The Rat was never tired of gazing at Jean's sturdier limbs with admiring envy. And he admired the English lad for gifts which he himself did not possess—his frank, if slow, speech, his cool genius in battle. So that to his own astonishment Jean found that he became a sort of unacknowledged leader amongst the Rats.

Sometimes Jean's influence was strong enough to restrain the imp-like performances of the Rat and his band. In the Feuillants, not far from the Tuileries, stood a bookshop, its little windows aflame with the political caricatures of the day. Jean had somewhere in his blood a love of books, and his feet often lingered in front of the windows of M. Toulan's shop. The wife was kindly. The shopkeeper himself, a quick-eyed, hot-tempered southerner, was for some reason in open feud with the Rats, who broke his windows and threatened to raid his establishment. M. Toulan, on his part, retaliated energetically, darting out from his shop, stick in hand, on any Rat or group of Rats that came within range of his vision. M. Toulan was an active politician; his flattened, prize-fighter-like nose

showed him to be of a combative temper, and he was a somewhat formidable figure in the agitated scenes of that stormy time.

Jean one night discovered that a raid of a serious sort, which the Rats seemed anxious to keep from his knowledge, was on foot. This made him curious, and he succeeded in discovering that it was levelled against the flat-nosed shopkeeper in the Feuillants and his kindly wife.

The Rats had chosen their time well. It was a winter night; the streets, as was usual in those wild times, were empty. Sudden gusts of rain whipped the pavements and roofs of the city. Toulan was at his political club. Suddenly the Rats broke in on the shop like a swarm of South American peccaries; the terrified woman was seized, her shrieks were silenced with threats, and the Rats began to spread themselves on errands of plunder and destruction over the house.

Just then there lounged into the ill-lit shop from the dark and windy street a figure that seemed tall amongst the undersized gamins intent on their work of mischief. Hands in pockets, the new-comer strolled across the shop floor, turned, and looked at the startled Rats. His appearance had arrested their malign activity. With loitering deliberation, not taking his hands out of his pockets, the new-comer—it was Jean—drawled out the words, "You had better go. Madame," he said with a jerk of his head towards the astonished woman, "is my friend."

Jean, as he spoke, looked around with eyes of lazy command. The slow and careless sentences seemed to paralyse the Rats.

"The wolves of the Halle-au-Blé," Jean went on, "are on a raid to-night."

An angry growl ran through the gamins as they listened, for the "wolves of the Halle-au-Blé" were a rival band with whom the Rats were in deadly feud.

"We will catch them," Jean continued, "in the Rue de Grenelle. Come," he said; and, still with hands in pockets, he strolled towards the door, casting a friendly glance at the woman as he went.

The Rats hesitated, but their leader was following Jean without a question, and they swarmed out into the streets after him. Whatever was the fate of the struggle with the "wolves," M. Toulan's shop and his wife escaped harm.

Jean shunned that shop for the next few days, but at last he met M. Toulan. The shopkeeper clapped his hand on Jean's shoulder. "Little one," he said, and his keen eyes shone with gratitude, "you saved my wife and my shop, and Toulan is your friend to the death." And, later, Jean found that friendship singularly useful.

The lad's life had some odd changes. Madame was capricious. She shunned meeting Jean as far as possible, but when they met his face affected her curiously. She was descending the stairs one evening in dainty dress to her salon, Denise by her side, when she met Jean climbing the stairs to his lonely room. His dress was neglected, on his sunless face lay an expression of dogged endurance. Madame looked at him as he shrank to the side of the stairs, and the accusing eyes of the boy seemed to sting her.

"Send him away," she cried sharply to M. Duclos, who was following her.

"Let him go to school, mamma," said Denise with a look of pity.

"Yes, to school—anywhere," exclaimed madame, and she swept on with a gesture of her hand and a shudder of her white shoulders as though dismissing Jean into space.

Jean accordingly found himself swept, as in a whirlwind, to the first school that offered. It was a dingy building in the Rue St. Jacques, where its head, M. Lepitre, ruled over a little community of restless boys.

M. Lepitre was a queer figure, short-necked and short-bodied, with goggle eyes and a fringe of white hairs on his head standing on end round a circular disc of mere crimson baldness as though charged with electricity. M. Lepitre, whatever his faults, was a scholar. He would roll out Latin hexameters in a voice of thunder and as though he relished each syllable. He was a politician more than a schoolmaster, and drew his politics from Greece and Rome, and adapted them to local use; for in those days every schoolroom was a political forum. M. Lepitre lived amongst Plutarch's characters, and had imagination enough to be himself a hero, but unhappily lacked both mind and body for the rôle.

He did not understand boys, and his pupils stung and tormented him like so many gadflies. But the goggle eyes were kindly, and they won Jean. Here was one at least who did not look askance at him as though he were a criminal, or dwell on him with a gaze so dark that it seemed to be hiding murder under its gloom. M. Lepitre, indeed, was oddly kind to Jean.

"You are stupid," he would say; "you will never learn, *mais vous êtes un gentilhomme.*"

But Jean could learn, in his silent, slow, unforgetting fashion; and M. Lepitre's teaching, if it found him, in spite of his neglected dress, with some of the instincts born of gentle blood, helped to keep these alive. But after a few months the school somehow came to a sudden end. M. Lepitre's pupils found the politics of the pavement more interesting than the lessons of the schoolroom, and flew like a covey of wildfowl into space. Jean drifted back once more to madame's house, to the lessons of the streets, and to the society of gamins.



CHAPTER IX

THE ESCAPE

JEAN had been uneasily conscious for some time that when by chance he met M. Duclos that gentleman's eyes dwelt upon him in a meditative way that showed some special purpose of evil was ripening in his plotting brain. When that purpose crystallised into action an instinct warned Jean that it would mean a plunge into still new disasters for him. So sure was he of this that it hardly surprised him when he awoke one morning to see M. Duclos standing by his bedside with a look of triumph in his deep-set eyes.

"An English lad," he said, with a visible relish in every slow syllable, "is degraded by nature; but I did not know that the son of your father could steal."

Jean's eyes were still heavy with sleep, but as he listened, and the meaning of the words crept to his brain, a spark of anger woke in them, and anger made the lad bold. He leaped from his bed and confronted the major-domo with a steady look.

"Yes," said M. Duclos sternly, "you have stolen madame's jewels. They were missed, and were found concealed in this room—at least part of them—and for a thief the only place is the Châtelet." Then, without

waiting for a reply, he went out, locking the door after him.

The sound of the bolt as it was shot into its socket sent an icy vibration through Jean's heart. What plot M. Duclos had woven, or what device against him he had on hand, Jean could not guess, but he never doubted that it would be carried through successfully. To be accused of theft! And the evil brain that planned the accusation would provide the evidence to sustain it. Jean felt, as he meditated on it all, as though shame scorched him like fire.

The hint of the Châtelet, too, thrilled him with dread. Of all the prisons in Paris this was the one most feared. Its dark frowning mass, set in a brown sea of slums, was a familiar sight to Jean. An atmosphere of cruelty lay about it. To be whipped for theft, and buried alive in the black depths of that ill-omened building—Jean knew that this meant his disappearance; it might mean death itself. What would they think of him in London when they heard the story?

Presently his stubborn English courage awoke. Why should he wait till M. Duclos returned with the gendarmes? He would flee. He would get somehow to London; and, as he called up the picture of his aunt's face, he felt sure she would refuse to believe this evil tale of theft.

All the lad's wits were now busily at work. To escape from madame's house was not impossible, but to tramp from Paris to the seaboard, to cross the Straits, to reach London—these were tasks which might well daunt even a stout heart. Jean's heart was stout enough, but his pockets were empty and he was

friendless. The Rat could not help him in this business. Jean could see no plan as he sat brooding over the problem, with bent head and stubborn courage, all through the lonely day till the darkness of night crept into the room.

He lay down at last and slept, but his sleep was broken. Presently he woke. The house was silent; he could not guess the hour, and in the dark he began meditating afresh over the problem of escape. The faint chime of a far-off church bell striking midnight reached him, and still he sat turning over one plan after another.

As he sat, staring with unseeing eyes into the gloom, he became aware of a faint film of light—a sort of milky stain—that seemed to creep under the bottom of the door. He heard no sound of steps, but the stain of light grew fuller. Then there came the slow creak of the lock, and his door was gently pushed back. Jean's nerves had grown tense with expectant fear, but it was Denise who stood there.

A hood was drawn over her head, her feet were bare, she carried a tiny candle in her hand, and in the disc of light her face—the pure white features, the shining and steadfast eyes—showed with startling effect. To Jean it seemed like the face of an angel. Had one of the saints whose pictures hung in madame's drawing-room stepped out of its frame, stolen a candle, and crept up through the darkness to visit him? But there was on Denise's features a very human look, an expression of girlish yet resolute purpose such as no artist could put into the countenance of a painted saint.

Jean had the scorn natural to his age and sex of a

girl's courage, or want of courage. But as he stared at the slender figure, the steady eyes, the little hand that grasped the candle, the dainty brow knitted into characters of resolve, he felt that here was a courage which a soldier might envy. What generous daring this slender girl had shown to form a plan for his escape, to secure the keys, to climb in the midnight darkness to his door in order to set him free! For that Denise came to release him Jean knew in a moment without words.

"I heard mamma and M. Duclos talk together," Denise whispered, and then the words died on her quivering lips.

Jean nodded comprehendingly. "I shall make for London," he said; and at this Denise in turn nodded with brief assent.

They whispered for a few moments together, but the darkness chilled them, and their very whispers seemed to run through the long dim corridor as though they would awaken the household. There was no need for explanation and no time for loitering. Jean took the slender fingers in his hand with wordless gratitude. Denise felt that the touch of the strong, warm hand holding hers so tightly was better than a caress, and meant more.

"We shall meet yonder, in London," said Jean, he hardly knew why, and it was with a conviction that came to him he knew not whence.

"Good-bye," he whispered again, and moved away in the darkness. He stopped, after taking a few steps, and came quickly back. He drew from some inner pocket a little book and thrust it into her hand.

"Mother gave it to me," he said; "it is all I've got."

It was a little Testament with bent and broken covers and many signs of use, the gift to Jean of tender hands now lying in the dusty grave. It was the boy's one treasure. With instinctive tact, Denise took the little book without protest. She knew all it represented. Jean was giving her the most precious thing he possessed.

"Yes," she whispered, "I'll love it for your sake."

Jean went down a few steps, then turned and looked back again. To his dying hour he never forgot the picture offered by the figure of the girl. Her face in the flame of the candle showed clear-cut like a cameo. A pity wordless but inexpressibly tender burned in her shining eyes. She smiled, in silent answer to his look, a smile that showed in the sudden gleam her white teeth. Then Jean passed out of sight, swallowed up in darkness, and Denise was left to creep back to her room.

Jean knew enough of the house to find his way out of it. He reached the street, stole through its emptiness, and stood a moment at the corner of the Rue de Grenelle. The dark night lay about him. The dark city was before him, in which there was not a roof to give him shelter. Beyond was the long, unknown road to the sea, the problem of crossing, the tramp to London. But Jean was of a fine courage, and he lingered for an instant ere he plunged into the tangle of sleeping alleys to reflect with a sense of humour how M. Duclos would find the nest empty and the bird flown when he came up to his room in the morning.

Mrs. Robert Lawrence was sitting by her comfortable fireside in London, many weeks afterwards, when a maid entered and said, "A boy wants to see you, ma'am."

Mrs. Lawrence went out into the hall, and saw a ragged boy, with broken boots and unwashed face, standing there, and her eyes ran over him with suspicious scrutiny. It was another street-beggar, and she drew her skirts most closely about her. The dusty, unwashed figure was an offence to the sacramental cleanliness of her house. Presently the boy lifted his face slowly with an odd shyness, and said, "Auntie."

Mrs. Lawrence stared a moment longer with uncomprehending eyes, then her lips began to tremble. She understood.

"Oh John, John!" she cried, and, running to him with outstretched hands, she kissed him and wept over him, her tears running afresh and her exclamations becoming more broken every time she glanced at the ragged dress, the thin face, strangely old for its years, and written over with signs both of hunger and suffering.

"Oh that Frenchwoman!" at last she cried, with a sudden vehemence, at which Jean laughed.

She asked no questions, but she never doubted that it was madame's wicked arts that sent back poor Jean a hungry, footsore, and ragged fugitive to her door. Then her housewifely instincts awoke. Jean—or John, as she instantly insisted on calling him—was carried off to a hot bath and to clean garments, and set down to a supper during which even his youthful hunger toiled in vain to meet the dainties his aunt's distressed care spread before him.

After supper he told his story, his uncle listening in angry silence and with knitted brows, while his aunt punctuated the tale with the oft-repeated and indignant cry, "Oh that Frenchwoman!"

CHAPTER X

DAYS OF PEACE

Now for John—the "Jean" was dropped with the rags he cast off in his uncle's bathroom on the night he had reached London—followed a long stretch of peaceful days, days that after the humiliations and haunting disquiets of madame's house had the airs of Paradise. The fear that had shut about him so long like an atmosphere faded into a vague memory. He was put under a good private tutor for a while, and later sent to a public school. The green of country lanes lay about him instead of the stony slums of Paris. He exchanged the foul airs of the great city on the Seine for the blowing winds of English downs, the Rat and his predatory band for the comradeship of English schoolboys.

Amongst his new comrades he was at first anything but popular. He seemed, to careless eyes, slow-witted. He had an unhurrying and loitering coolness which his teachers called obstinacy. His school companions, like his teachers, looked at him with doubtful eyes. His French experiences hung round him like a mystery; and English schoolboys do not like mysteries. The English boy of that day, it may be added, had a special dislike for mysteries with a French flavour. It was

only the circumstance that Jack Lawrence's fighting gifts were beyond suspicion, and were of the true British type, which saved him from being permanently branded as "Froggie" and sent to Coventry as guilty of being more than half French.

There was certainly a strain of something uncanny about the lad. He had not lived so long under the shadow of M. Duclos and on the edge of a revolution without some mark being left on him. His French experiences had aged him. The clear, deep-set eyes seemed curiously watchful, as though they were constantly on guard against hidden but haunting peril. A gravity, not to say a sadness, in odd discord with his youth lay on the thin face.

Sometimes, however, when in congenial company, or when seduced into a game that interested him, his apparent slow-wittedness fell from him like a mask, his face lit up, he became alert and resourceful. A compelling energy of will awoke in him that gave him an easy leadership over his comrades. And if he was careless over his lessons he had a keen interest in other things. He knew every path and stream, bird-haunted pool or nested hedge for miles around. No persuasion could make him a student; but he read with greedy appetite, and absorbed more knowledge than could be compressed within the narrow limits of examination-papers. He had a gift for languages, and he knew French with an intimacy and a command of the *argot* of Parisian gamins which left his French master wide-eyed with astonishment. But acquirements of this sort do not lead to a profession, and Robert Lawrence admitted with a sigh that to send the young fellow to Oxford would be a waste of time and money.

Paris grew dim to the lad. Echoes of great events filling the world with their tumult reached even the class-rooms and playing-fields of his school, but they seemed to him remote. All the figures in the sordid drama of his Parisian experiences grew indistinct. The Rat, Toulan, the goggle-eyes of Lepitre, even the dark face of M. Duclos began to fade.

Of all his Paris memories, only one survived with unfading clearness. It was the face of Denise! And always it was the Denise of the midnight visit: a girlish figure, candle in hand, with shawl-hooded face, who unlocked the room in madame's house and saved him from the Châtelet. As he lay in his bed in the darkness, with his schoolmates asleep about him, he could see at will, painted on the dark as on some black canvas, the white brow, the shining eyes, and the smile such as he had never seen on any other human lips, sad with the grief of parting and sweet with innocent love.

Meanwhile, an event occurred which completely changed the young fellow's prospects.

Robert Lawrence was sitting in his dingy chambers one foggy October afternoon, bending with frowning brows over a long and tangled brief, when his clerk entered with a card in his hand.

"A gentleman to see you, sir."

The lawyer looked at the card offered him with a gesture of impatience.

"Dr. Graham! I can't see a client except through a solicitor."

Then he repeated the name meditatively. It stirred some dim memories in his brain, out of which presently emerged a vision of the little room in the

British Embassy at Paris, the open safe, his brother's will.

"This must be the doctor," he reflected, "who witnessed John's will. He may help to solve the puzzle of it.—Show him in," he said briefly.

Dr. Graham's face was brown with Eastern suns, and the shrewd Scottish eyes above the high cheek-bones had a troubled and half-ashamed look as they met the lawyer's gaze.

"I am in a strange puzzle," he said, going bluntly to his business, "about your brother's will."

"And so am I," answered the lawyer; "so there are two puzzled men. It was a bad will," he went on with emphasis. "It robbed his own son for the sake of a woman whom my brother at the very time he made that will had ceased to respect. For he had found out that she was nothing better than a political spy."

"But the will is a fraud."

"How do you know?" asked the startled and incredulous lawyer.

"Because I have got the true one, the one I witnessed."

"But you gave me the one now before the court yourself. It was in an envelope endorsed by you in my brother's presence, and kept for security in the safe at the Embassy. Did you give me a false will?"—and the lawyer looked with shrewd and challenging eyes at his visitor. "And do you come to tell me that?"

"Yes, I come to tell you that," said Dr. Graham ruefully. "The Scotch side of my head warned me to keep quiet, for the story will prove me to be a fool and make some people suspect me to be a rogue; but I

have a Scottish conscience as well as a Scottish head, and I cannot see a great fraud committed. Some strange trick was played on me in that sick-chamber—a trick that cheated my very senses." He drew from his pocket a sheet of paper and laid it before the lawyer. "Look," he said; "that is the will your brother signed, and the only one he signed."

The body of the will was short and clearly written, the signature beneath was in trembling characters, a black smudge disfigured the margin of the sheet.

"That is the will he *ought* to have signed," said Robert Lawrence as he read it. "It does not rob the boy. But this is no good," he went on. "This is not witnessed. And how did you come to witness the other document?"

There was a hard note in his voice as he asked the question.

"I witnessed *that*," said the Scotchman doggedly, and put his finger on the paper lying on the desk.

"Nobody witnessed it. The only thing beside what claims to be the testator's signature is a smudge."

"The smudge," said the doctor, "is my signature, and a safer one than I could make with a pen."

Then Dr. Graham told his story. He had gone to India, leaving his rooms in London locked up, with his books and part of his wardrobe packed safely away. He had just come back to England; and when settling in his rooms afresh, and unpacking his effects, he had found in the breast-pocket of one of his coats the document on the desk.

"Now," he said, "you know your brother signed only one will on that day in Paris?"

"Yes; the people on the other side agree as to that."

"Well, *that* is the will he signed. By some fraud, some clever sleight-of-hand, I was tricked into witnessing another will. But that is the true will, and *there* is my signature."

"The smudge?" asked Lawrence in a tone of ridicule.

"Yes, the smudge. It is the impression of my thumb. A drop of ink had fallen on the paper, and, catching it from your brother's hands as he seemed about to faint, I put my thumb on the ink-spot, and so left that impression on the paper."

"But if I recollect aright there is a smudge on the will they have got too."

"Yes; but it cannot be of *my* thumb. And show me that smudge and I will find the man who played the trick on me;" and the doctor's eyes sparkled vengefully as he spoke. "He made me a fool, and he gave effect to a fraud. The pattern of the skin of the thumb," Dr. Graham went on to explain, "is absolutely distinct in every case. It is Nature's cipher. She never repeats it. It cannot be imitated or altered. It is characteristic and separate in every case. You have only to look at that smudge through a magnifying-glass to see."

He pulled out a magnifying-glass and offered it to the lawyer, who with minute care examined the smudge as though it were some Chaldaic inscription or fragment of black-letter Latin.

"It is the exact transcript of that thumb," said the doctor, holding up his hand. "There is no duplicate of it on any other human hand. You may take the record

of a thousand thumbs; no one is the replica of the other. In India this is well known, and is admitted in the law courts."

"Yes," said Robert Lawrence; "I have heard of it, and thought it only an Eastern folly."

"Well, the West has something to learn from the East in that as in many other things. It is not a folly," Dr. Graham repeated; "it is a scientific fact. Signatures written by the pen vary; they can be imitated. But the lines wrought into the skin are Nature's monogram; they are ineffaceable, and nobody can forge them."

Robert Lawrence questioned the doctor shrewdly till the whole story was clear, and then sat for a while meditating, a look of power coming into his brow as he thought. Then in legal fashion he slowly summed up the situation:

"You witnessed in different fashion two wills, and my brother signed only one."

"And *that* is the one," interjected the Scotch doctor.

"You were tricked. And how were you tricked?"

"I do not know, but I begin to guess. Let me see the other will and I will tell you."

"Well, it is unprofessional, and the papers are with Lempriere, who acts for the other side. But he is a sensible fellow, and I think will let us see them. They have secured administration of the will in France, and have got the estate there; but here in England I have opposed the will on the boy's behalf, mainly on the ground of undue influence. I have fought for time, in the hope that something might turn up, and the state of affairs in France has helped me. One never knew what might happen there at any moment.

The guillotine might cut madame's claim short. As it is, her major-domo is here in London at the present moment claiming to act on her behalf. They have spent the French property; but the English estate consists, in the main, of broad acres in the country and of London freeholds. And the courts do not look kindly on a will executed in a foreign country which displaces a man's own flesh and blood in favour of a foreigner of doubtful antecedents. Come," he said, getting up, " let us go and see Lempriere."

CHAPTER XI

THE TWO WILLS

THE other counsel was in his chambers, and proved reasonable, and the disputed will was readily produced. The doctor examined it carefully, passing over the faint characters that purported to be the signature of John Lawrence, and scrutinising through his magnifying-glass the smudge on the edge of the paper.

"Yes, *that* is my signature," he said, pointing to the written characters, "but *that* is somebody else's," pointing to the smudge; "and *that* is *not* John Lawrence's signature. The thing is a fraud. My senses were all about me in that sick-room. Somehow I felt there was roguery in the air, and so, I think, did your brother; and that," pointing to the document, "shows our suspicions were just. The key to the fraud lies under that smudge. Find out the thumb that left that mark. Its owner is the rogue, and I suspect the major-domo. I did not like his shifty eyes and furtive look at the time.

"I can guess now how he performed the trick. I took the will from your brother's hands as he seemed about to faint, and gave it to the major-domo, and for nearly half-an-hour was attending to the sick man. For that time the will which carried your brother's

signature, but which I had not witnessed, was in the scoundrel's power. He took it with him when he left the room. I am sure of that, because he had to be called into the room when I was ready to witness the will. He came after a delay which, I remember, exasperated me, and brought it with him. He must have had the second sheet ready all the while, watching for a chance to substitute it for the true will when the time came for signing. But your brother made me read the document before he signed it.

"When he fainted, and the rogue had possession of the signed will, and was able to take it out of the room for a few moments, he forged your brother's signature on *that* paper," pointing to the sheet on the table—"not a difficult task for such clever fingers. Then, to make it agree in appearance with the genuine will, he put on the smudge of ink. When called into the room he solemnly put this on the table for me to witness. He must be a cool and daring rogue, for he took a tremendous risk. But I was in a hurry. I saw on the sheet what I thought was your brother's signature. I knew I had made a smudge on the paper, and a smudge was there. So I signed it without reading it and detecting the change."

Dr. Graham looked as if he still were heartily ashamed of himself. A Scotchman to have been tricked so coolly by a Frenchman, and in such a business as the signing of a will which affected nearly half a million's worth of property! "D—— the rogue," he said heartily.

"The story is plausible," commented Lempriere, "but there is no legal proof."

"But," said Dr. Graham hotly, as he held out his

magnifying-glass once more, "look at the difference of the two thumb-marks. They are more unlike than two faces. *That* is my mark, and that is *not* my mark."

The lawyers examined the two smudges afresh with great care.

"It is odd, no doubt," said Lempriere, "but the courts have never yet admitted evidence of that character."

"Give me the print of the major-domo's thumb," cried Graham, "and I will stake my head it is the transcript of *that*," and he pointed to the smudge on the witnessed will.

"That is a rash wager for a Scotchman," said Robert Lawrence; "a good Scottish head for a Frenchman's thumb. But how can we get it?" And the lawyer knitted his brow meditatively. "Will you," he said at last to Lempriere, "ask the scamp to dine with you? After all, he has the manners of a gentleman, and he represents your client. You need not take him to your house; dine with him at one of the coffee-houses. Let the doctor be the third man in the party, and trust to his wit to get the print of the Frenchman's thumb. I cannot be there, for it would be unprofessional, as I represent the other side. But he is your client," he repeated, "and Graham is your witness."

"Yes," said Lempriere reluctantly. "I do not like the business, but I like the flavour of a possible fraud still less. The man," he admitted, "looks and dresses like a gentleman, and so, doctor, you shall have the chance you want. If there is a fraud, and a French fraud too, designed to rob an English boy of his estate I do not think that my professional duty requires me to prevent it being found out."

And Lempriere, a good lawyer but a sound Tory, who, like all the Tories of that age, thought it part of their religion to hate a Frenchman, laughed dryly.

Lempriere found no difficulty in arranging for the dinner-party.

"Dr. Graham," he told the Frenchman, "is not a very friendly witness, but he might be of importance. When the case comes into court we shall be obliged to call him, and so you had better meet him."

Two nights later the party met at a famous coffee-house in the Strand, and dined together. The lawyer was surly and ill at ease, as if taking part in a business he disliked. But Dr. Graham was chatty and pleasant. The dinner was good, the wines of the best; and M. Duclos, who was plainly on his guard at first, relaxed, and showed himself an excellent talker. He had much to tell of Paris, and the wild doings there, and the tangle and distraction of its politics, to which the other men listened with unaffected interest.

Then the talk was turned adroitly on India, and the doctor was rich in anecdotes bearing on the subtlety of the Indian intellect and the cleverness of Indian rogues.

"Let me tell you," he said, "one of the oddest stories I know. But to understand it we must try a little experiment first." He told the waiter to bring the inkstand, and, taking up a dinner-card, he coolly let fall a drop of ink on it.

"Now, Mr. Lempriere, put your thumb on that and press it steadily for a moment. Now, initial the smudge so as to identify it by-and-by.

He then put a second drop on the card, and asked M. Duclos to do the same.

The Frenchman hesitated for a moment, but he hardly knew why. The incident seemed natural, the doctor was waiting with the outstretched card, and the Frenchman pressed his thumb upon the drop of ink and then initialled the mark. The doctor, in his turn, went through the same process. The blots quickly dried, and then the doctor produced his inevitable magnifying-glass.

"See," he said, as he bade them examine in turn each smear, "it is a clear enough print of our thumbs, and how distinct the pattern of the lines is in each case! Nature never repeats her ciphers. This is a scientific identification of the human hand, and of the owner of the hand, which can never be cheated."

Then he told how the thumb-mark was used for purposes of identification in India, and related an amusing tale of how a rogue had been detected by the print of his finger-tips, and punished. When he finished the story, as though in a careless fashion, he slipped the menu-card in his coat-pocket.

The little party broke up early, but Lempriere and the doctor lingered for a moment after the Frenchman had gone.

"I will call in the morning at your office," said the Scotchman, "and we will compare the thumb-mark on the alleged will with the print M. Duclos has left on the menu-card. If they are identical is not my case proved?"

"Well," answered the lawyer cautiously, "I will not say that, and I am not the full court. But at all events it will be important if the two impressions prove to be identical."

The next morning the doctor and the two lawyers

met in Lempriere's chambers. The conflicting wills were produced, and the menu-card with its initialled smudges lay beside them.

"Look how different are the three marks on the dinner-card," said the doctor, as he put his magnifying-glass over them in turn. They are separate and unmistakable. This is my own; compare it with that on the will which lay for three years in my coat-pocket here in London while I was in India."

The two legal heads bent in turn over the prints.

"Yes," Lempriere admitted, "the smudges are twins. Each is the transcript of your thumb, doctor. Who could have believed that a tracery of lines so definite and unmistakable in pattern was hidden under that ink-stain!

"Now," he said with energy, "let us compare the print the Frenchman left on the menu-card with that on what they say is the true will. If they correspond exactly with each other, doctor, your case is proved; and whether the courts accept your evidence or not, John Lempriere will not lend his wit and time to help a fraud."

"You agree that the thumb-mark on that will is not mine?" asked the doctor.

Then he put the print of M. Duclos's thumb, as it stood on the menu-card, beside that on the will. Each of the lawyers in turn examined it with minutest care.

"Yes, doctor, that is the rogue's thumb-mark."

"D—— him!" cried Lempriere. "He had to reproduce the smudge to make the two documents agree, and in doing that he supplied the proof of his own villainy. I shall throw up the case. I think I

ought to ask the court to impound the documents and to prosecute the scoundrel."

"No," said Robert Lawrence, "we need not do that. If the Frenchman finds his trick is detected he will take himself off. We can let both the wills drop out of the case, and the boy will inherit as his father's heir." After some debate this was agreed upon.

The next day M. Duclos, by appointment, called at Lempriere's office. The doctor sat at the table as he entered, and the Frenchman's vigilant senses warned him instantly that there was danger in the meeting. He sat down at the table and looked with keen and watchful eyes at the pair of grim faces opposite him.

"M. Duclos," said Lempriere, going straight to the business, "you left that print of your thumb on the menu-card a couple of nights ago; but when did you put *that* mark on the will," pointing to the sheet of paper that lay on the desk before him.

"That is not the mark of my thumb," replied the Frenchman steadily. "Dr. Graham ought to remember that he is responsible for that smear."

"No," cried Lempriere, "if you choose to examine them you will see that the two prints are identical."

The Frenchman waved the magnifying-glass aside carelessly.

"One thumb-print is very like another."

"Ah, that is where your scientific ignorance has led you into a trap," said the doctor.

"My ignorance, scientific or otherwise," answered the Frenchman, "hardly affects a legal question."

"But this is a question of hard facts," exclaimed the lawyer, pointing to the mark on the paper.

"Dr. Graham knows perfectly well that he put that smear on it."

"No," replied the lawyer, pulling out a drawer and producing the other will, "here is the print of Dr. Graham's thumb; and," he added, "here is the will John Lawrence signed. Whoever put his thumb-print on that sheet," pointing to the false will, "forged the dying man's signature; and since that thumb-print is certainly yours, M. Duclos, you are responsible for the fraud."

The Frenchman had gone suddenly white. His hands clutched the edge of the table as though to keep him from falling. His eyes flitted to and fro like those of a hunted animal. But he had an admirable courage.

"You hold a brief, Mr. Lempriere," he said, "for madame. Is it the fashion for an English lawyer to trap his client?"

"An honest man," replied the old lawyer sternly, "does not fear traps; and an English lawyer when he finds he holds a brief for a fraud gives up his case. You had better go back to Paris, M. Duclos," he went on coolly; "you will find there a field better suited to your genius than London offers. When your case is called on I shall tell the court I withdraw from it, and I shall keep these documents. If any attempt is made to revive the case I will use them against you."

The Frenchman looked at the two faces—the doctor's strong Scottish features, the lawyer's legal brow and his shrewd and penetrating eyes. Here were forces, he knew, too strong for him. But he was not unequal to the occasion. He rose, bowed with elaborate politeness.

"I see," he said, "that in England justice learns to be patriotic. A Frenchman fares ill—because he is French."

"No," replied the lawyer, "but rogues on this side of the Channel are a little less triumphant than on the other side. You had better go back to Paris, M. Duclos. It is your natural field."

CHAPTER XII

A NEW CAREER

His natural inheritance thus came happily back to young Jack Lawrence, and he was now the heir to what was still a great fortune, even after madame had spent the French part of it. His uncle, however, was a practical man, with a wise sense that a young fellow needed a definite career to give purpose to his life. But what career would suit Jack? He was too old for the navy, he had no predilection for the army or the Church.

Fox, who took a generous, if careless, interest in his old friend's son, brought the question to an issue with characteristic shrewdness.

"What are you going to do with poor Lawrence's son?" he asked.

"I am puzzled," said Robert Lawrence. "He is too old for the navy, he does not care for the army, and apparently has not brains enough for the law. His teachers say that he is slow-witted."

"Nonsense," answered Fox. "There are brains somewhere behind that square forehead he owes to his father, poor fellow; and he has his mother's honest eyes. He has survived the Frenchwoman and that

scoundrel the major-domo. His dullness is only a mask. He knows French like his mother-tongue, and he must know more about French politics than half the men in the Foreign Office."

"French politics!" said Robert Lawrence in wonder. "He only knows the gutters of Paris."

"Well, France is ruled to-day from the gutters of Paris, if we're to believe all Burke says. To-morrow its gamins will be its statesmen, and he knows *them* well, doesn't he? The Foreign Office," Fox said with conviction, "is the place for him. They hate me on the Treasury bench; but old Lord —— is a good fellow, and I will speak to him."

When Fox took the trouble to interest himself in anything he was a force to be reckoned with, and in due course John Lawrence found himself sitting at a desk in the Foreign Office.

Meanwhile, great events in Paris, as the years crept on, were sending their vibrations round the world. An ancient monarchy was falling, and the crash threatened to shake all the thrones of Europe. France was passing through a terrible new birth, and no one knew in what aspect it would emerge from the process.

John had seen the States-General meet—the opening scene in the terrific drama of the Revolution. His boyish eyes had watched the stately procession in which so many figures were marching, all unconscious, towards a goal of which they little guessed. Since he had reached London had come the news of the capture of the Bastille, an event which was more than the fall of a fortress or even of a dynasty. It meant the overthrow of a political system. Next came the memorable Feast of Pikes, an event which mistook itself for an idyllic

scene of peace. But this strange dove of peace had steel pikes for pinions!

Then followed the flight of the royal family, the return of Louis XVI., a prisoner, to his own capital; the emergence of the Commune, and the appearance of that still more alarming apparition, the Jacobin Club. By the end of 1791 perplexed Europe was full of strange fears. The Revolution was a menace to the world. How far might not this newly kindled conflagration spread!

At his desk in the Foreign Office, Jack Lawrence, whose business it was to translate and docket the French despatches, watched the whole wild drama with kindling interest and with eyes which had learned insight from his contact with the crowds of Paris and his familiarity with the oratory of the pavements.

Then came a personal event which changed the current of his life and flung him into strange scenes and perils.

"Lawrence," said Fox, as he met the lawyer at his club one night, "there's a bit of news from Paris which ought to interest you. Madame has been arrested, and her head must sit very loosely just now on her pretty shoulders."

"Madame arrested! What for?"

"Well, she has been sailing in very stormy waters, and some eddy of the political whirlpool has caught her dainty little pleasure-boat and capsized it. She is in either the Châtelet or the Abbaye."

"And has that scamp Duclos been arrested too?"

"Oh, no! He is more cautious than madame. I suspect he always had relations with the wilder spirits of the Revolution, and he renounced madame after the

English estate had slipped out of her hands. He is a member of the Jacobin Club, and it is fast becoming the supreme force in Paris. If madame is to lose her head, I imagine he will be quite willing to pull the string that lets the knife fall."

Jack learned the news that night from his uncle's lips, and he broke out hurriedly with the question, "But what about Denise?"

"The child ought to be safe," said Robert Lawrence. "They are not sending children to the guillotine."

But the younger man knew enough to be sure that neither her youth nor her sex was any guarantee that Denise would be safe after her mother's arrest. Would M. Duclos protect her? Yes, as a tiger might protect a lamb. Denise was now a girl of fifteen, and in the madness of Paris what perils might not threaten her. Jack pictured her cast a homeless waif into the streets. What refuge was there for her?

As he thought of that slender figure, set lonely and unfriended in such perils, every nerve in his body thrilled with sudden purpose. He would go to her help, and he clenched his hand as though it grasped a sword! She came through the darkness of midnight to his door to save him from the Châtelet. He would face all risks to rescue her from what might well be worse perils than any which lay in the darkness of that dreaded prison-house.

Characters written with a certain ink on litmus paper are invisible, but when exposed to heat they creep into vision and can be read; and the sudden fire of concern kindled by the news of Denise's peril acted on young Lawrence's memory in the same way. Things forgotten became luminous.

His mind ran quickly over the familiar scenes and figures of the French capital, and they came back to him with strange clearness. He felt he knew Paris once more with the intimacy of one of its gamins. He would find helpers amongst his old associates. Lepitre he doubted, Toulan he could perhaps trust. Then he thought of the Rat, and he smiled, in spite of the anxiety of his mood, as he pictured the ferret eyes, the pointed chin of his old follower. He could bend him to his will at pleasure. The Rat, indeed, might be a better ally than men in great positions.

He told his uncle of his plans the next morning, and was bluntly pronounced by that sagacious lawyer a fool to entertain any such thought.

"You will risk," he said with emphasis, "your career and your life by going to Paris just now."

"I do not see why I should risk either. I know my way about Paris as though I had been born there, and I think I know where to get help."

"You will never get leave," replied his uncle with confidence.

"I think I shall. Indeed, I can help the Foreign Office, for I know men and affairs in Paris better than the secret agents they now employ."

"Help the Foreign Office!" cried his uncle with scorn. "Why, you know only the gamins of Paris."

"Yes, uncle; but France is just now borrowing its politics from its gamins. Their ideals are shaping French affairs, and *will* shape them."

Robert Lawrence stared to hear Fox's words on his nephew's lips, and as he looked at him he realised that here was a will stronger than his own. Jack Lawrence was no longer a boy. He was a young fellow of

twenty, with broad shoulders and grave face. The news from Paris had acted on him like a challenge. The dreamy look that usually sat on his countenance had vanished. There was power on his dark brow and purpose in his keen eyes.

The long-limbed figure, the square head set on the square shoulders, the resolved lines on the dark countenance, the frank eyes steady with purpose—his mother's eyes of honest blue—under the black brows, these were all the signs of a force of character he had never suspected his abstracted-looking nephew to possess.

Jack feared his aunt's opposition more than his uncle's, and he approached her with some adroitness.

"Aunt," he said, "if your little Chris had fallen into some black well and was at the point of being drowned, do you think I ought to jump in and rescue her?"

"John," said his aunt, with an alarmed look round for her little girl, as though to be sure she had not been swallowed up in some deep pit, "do not talk of such dreadful things. But if it *did* happen," she added with a smile at her own alarm, "why, of course you would save the little maiden."

Then Jack expounded his parable. Denise was at that moment in urgent peril. He was the only friend she had. He must go to Paris to try and rescue her. As Mrs. Lawrence listened, her kindly eyes grew moist.

"Yes, John, madame deserves neither pity nor help. She is amongst her own people and has made her own bed. But that brave child, with neither mother nor father, in that dreadful city——"

As Mrs. Lawrence spoke all the mother awoke in her. "Yes, John, you *ought* to go. But oh, my dear,

my dear," she said—and here Mrs. Lawrence's Spartan virtue dissolved in mere tears.

Young Lawrence interviewed his official chief that same day.

"I must go to Paris, sir," he said briefly, "and cannot say for how long I may be detained there, and I want you to give me leave of absence."

Mr. Herriott stared. Leave of absence asked by a junior officer, and in such accents of confidence, offended all his official instincts.

"Go to Paris! You cannot go, Mr. Lawrence."

"I must go, sir. I want, indeed, to be authorised to use the agents of the Office in Paris to carry out my plans," and he briefly explained his object.

The chief smiled satirically.

"This is all very interesting; and you want to use your time and the machinery of the British Foreign Office to serve a private interest. Your request is at least ingenuous."

"But I can make it a public service, sir. I know Paris better than any of the secret agents you employ. They mislead you constantly."

"How do you know, Mr. Lawrence?"

"The Paris despatches come to me for translation, and so I know all their blunders. I can give you a catalogue of them. They have never been right. They are all Royalists, and their wishes blind their judgment. M. Target is advising you now that the Moderates are certain to triumph over the extreme party. But he is wrong. The Mountain is crushing, and will crush, the Girondists."

"This is interesting once more, Mr. Lawrence; but, again, how do you know?"

"It is a revolution, sir, which is in progress; and history shows that in a revolution—in the earlier stages at all events—it is the extreme party which prevails. Besides, I know Paris, and know many of the men who are coming to the front."

"You know, I understand, the Paris of the gutters."

"Well, sir, the revolution on your own theory reflects the Paris of the gutters. It is to be interpreted from the gutters. M. Target tells you the Jacobin Club will be suppressed. I am confident it will overthrow all its rivals."

"You are surprisingly confident on a great variety of topics, Mr. Lawrence."

"I am confident, sir, because I know. Our agents are not in touch with the right men."

Here was one of the youngest members of his staff talking diplomacy with accents of quite absurd certainty; yet it was with a penetration which made his chief uncomfortable. At that moment the door opened, and an attendant entered.

"Lord Granville asks for you, sir."

Jack waited for nearly an hour until his chief returned. His face was flushed. He plainly had been dealing with some unpleasant business.

"Mr. Lawrence," he said, "some of your views at all events are right. The intelligence just to hand is that the Jacobin Club has declared itself in permanent session. It is plainly seizing control of affairs. Our secret agents on the spot, it must be admitted, are blundering. Lord Granville has asked me to find some special agent—an unknown man for choice, so that he will escape suspicion—but whom we can absolutely trust, and send him to Paris for an independent report

on the present state of things there. You shall go. It's quite exceptional to employ so young a man on such a business; but, then, you know Paris as nobody else available knows it. You know, too, that side of its life which just now, when all the ordinary landmarks have disappeared, may help to interpret affairs there. The business of that poor girl is a matter of purely personal interest; but our agents shall help you in it, and you may help the Office by getting better information than we now receive."

Jack took his instructions with a calmness that somehow increased his chief's respect for him. This young official, it was clear, had some gifts he had never yet been suspected of possessing.

CHAPTER XIII

IN PARIS AGAIN

It was late one afternoon when Jean—he took a French name again as soon as his feet touched French soil—found himself in Paris once more; and as he walked, dressed as a French workman and with a story to match, along its narrow streets it seemed as though the years betwixt had slipped from him. He almost felt himself a gamin again. He looked around, expecting to see the Rat thrust his pointed chin and ferret-like eyes out of some dark alley. All his old familiarity with the city revived. He walked past madame's house, but the building was shut up and apparently empty. He had secured a room without difficulty in a narrow street near the Châtelet, and spent the first day exploring the city.

But he quickly realised that it was a new Paris on which he looked. Here was a city not merely shaken with a thousand agitations and passions, effervescing with angry oratory in every square, and black with drifting and excited crowds on every pavement. The crowds wore a strange aspect. The signs of wild alarms and of wild hopes were visible enough; but there was something added which Jean had never seen

before. The dark, preoccupied look on men's faces, the hurrying steps, the whispered and furtive conferences —all seemed to him tokens that some mysterious event was on foot. The sense of a swift-coming crisis seemed to be in the very atmosphere.

He had reached Paris at a moment history was long to remember. It was the afternoon of August 9, 1792. In the hours of the coming night great events were fermenting.

A revolution, especially of the French variety, is apt to march quickly. Jean had watched the procession of the States-General on May 4, 1789—a little more than three years before. It was, as events proved, a stately and picturesque illusion. In less than six weeks the Tiers État had thrust both the other orders aside and proclaimed itself a National Assembly. A month later the Bastille was falling.

How much had fallen since! The Church had gone, the nobility had fled, the king had tried to flee and had been brought ignobly back. What a wreckage of ancient traditions and habitudes the astonished world had seen! But it is not easy for a nation to cast off a whole set of social forms and to evolve a new set. Ancient names yet survived; political traditions and usages that ought to have disappeared still walked about like animated corpses that had somehow evaded burial.

France was still a monarchy. Louis XVI. sat in the Tuileries, his red Swiss Guards about him. He even ventured, on occasion, to whisper the magic word "veto" that paralysed the most beneficent laws. The Assembly debated; but it was broken up into three great mutually hating parties—the Gironde, the Plain,

and the Mountain. The Mountain, in which were reflected the passions of the Paris sections, was in a minority. The Paris municipality itself, that had flamed so long a portent to mankind, had sunk to mere smoke. It threatened, indeed, to become an extinct volcano. The Revolution would not march.

Impatient Paris could wait no longer. The forty-eight sections had met, and had each elected three representatives whose patriotism was of an heroic quality. These one hundred and forty-four were to form a Commune—a name destined to be terrible. This very night they intended to seize the Hôtel de Ville, dismiss into space the old Municipal Council, and capture Paris; and Paris, at that moment, in a special sense was France. A state of insurrection was to be proclaimed, the National Assembly was to be purged and transformed into the Convention.

The Revolution, in brief, was moving to its natural climax. Its wilder forces were capturing it. Betwixt the States-General and the Convention, the old Paris municipality and the Commune, the Cabinet of Necker and the Committee of Public Safety, there is an interval of time surprisingly brief. But how wide and terrible is the moral interval which parts these names!

Jean, of course—though, thanks to his early Paris experiences, he understood something of the French temper and the drift of French affairs—did not realise all this. Yet he felt vaguely that wild forces were abroad. The night was clear, the high stars shone in the quiet heavens. A curve of white fire—the crescent moon—hung above the black towers of Notre Dame. But if there was peace in the star-crowded sky, tumult

and storm were on the dark earth. Paris was awake in every nerve. In its narrow streets and dark lanes strange tides were flowing, and in spite of himself Jean caught the infection of the restless crowds. He swung with the hurrying groups betwixt what some strange instinct proclaimed to be the two opposing centres—the Tuileries and the Hôtel de Ville.

The Assembly was in session, with open doors and lighted windows and sounds of debate that at times reached even the jeering streets; but that wild night the Assembly was rather the prize of combat than one of the combatants. Round the Tuileries flowed more ominous sounds—the rumble of guns, the clatter of armed squadrons, the tread of disciplined feet, hoarse shouts of command, the clash of steel. There was the glare of lights in every window of the great building. And from the crowded bridges near, from every street that opened on it, sullen crowds watched the hated palace of Louis XVI.

But Jean realised that the Hôtel de Ville was the true centre of action. Its dark front was pricked with a hundred red points of light. Agitated figures thronged in and out of its doors. The black streets about it were full of agitated crowds. Here was the true heart of Paris, and all about it passions cruel as fear and blind as the night were rising like some sea-tide. Across the house-roofs from every direction—now harsh and now faint—came the sound of drums beating the *generale*.

A little after midnight Jean was passing the most picturesque of Paris churches, Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, when from its tall and graceful tower broke, sudden and deep, the stern clamour of bells.

It was an evil omen. A little over two centuries ago from the iron throats of those same bells came the signal for the bloody feast of St. Bartholomew!

Jean stood still to listen. The storm of sound grew wilder as one church tower called to another through the night. The black midnight sky was shaken with the iron clangour of alarum-bells. The sound set all feet running, and Jean presently found himself one of a vast multitude in front of the Hôtel de Ville. Its gloomy mass wore a more evil aspect than ever, with the frantic sound of the calling bells rolling above its roof, red lights in its many windows, and the tumult of the shouting crowds about its walls. But for a while nothing happened. The Revolution loitered. The wild, planless hours crept on, and still no signal for movement came. The crowd wanted a leader, some single figure visible and picturesque. A committee of a hundred and forty-four patriots, with scarves, even though their patriotism is beyond proof, cannot persuade a revolution to march.

But the sections were somehow—nobody exactly knew how—set moving at last, and in the gray dawn the angry human tide about the Hôtel de Ville found direction. The streets were shaken with the tread of countless feet. Paris—the Paris of the sections—was about to fling itself on the Tuileries! Soon all the bridges and streets that opened on the great building were black with crowds more or less armed. The stately palace was an island round which a wrathful human sea was flowing in wild eddies, and over which these eddies must soon break.

Jean climbed on to the parapet of the Pont de Neuf, from which he could see the whole front of the

Tuileries. Across the streets opening on to it were clusters of guns and squadrons of cavalry. In the garden of the Tuileries itself were clear-cut lines of red, the steadfast and faithful Swiss. Agitated figures, with gestures of alarm, came and went at all the windows; but that girdle of red was steady as granite.

Jean turned presently to look at the faces about him. Near him was the figure of an artillery officer with uniform not too fresh. The clear-cut features, the complexion with its tints of dead gold, the straight forehead, the flashing eyes, seemed familiar. Jean looked again. It was his comrade of Brienne, *Paille au nez*—the Napolione of bygone years. His hair was cut square on the forehead, and hung down the cheeks, making a dark frame for the thin and sallow face.

Jean felt his pulses quicken as he looked; he involuntarily put out his hand and touched the arm of his old chum. The artillery officer turned. The keen dark eyes ran swiftly over Jean's features. There was recognition in them; but after a few brief words be turned impatiently to watch the scene before him.

He had no time to waste on personal emotions. He was looking at history; and Jean, as he glanced in turn from the Tuileries to the face of his companion, clear-cut as the die of a coin, tried to guess what thoughts were behind the mask of those intent features. Here was a conflict of forces—disciplined force with the red Swiss, the energy of numbers and of passion with the crowd. This shabby artillery officer was plainly assessing these threatening opposites.

His instinct as a soldier made him sympathise with the Swiss. His eyes ran with a look of contempt over

the distracted crowd. Here was power, the power born of mass and of fury, but it was planless and blind. Then he fixed his gaze on the slender but steadfast lines of red—the orderly guns drawn across the streets, the squadrons of cavalry behind, the horses' heads tossing impatiently. They were few, but they represented discipline.

"They only want a leader," said Napolione, as though to himself; and as his quick, deep eyes ran to and fro from the crowd to the little red parallelograms in front of the Tuileries, Jean felt that here was not only a soldier assessing the rival forces, but a leader choosing the points of attack or the methods of defence.

Just then a group of figures came out of the great central door of the Tuileries. Women and children were in it. They passed along the red lines of the Swiss, and came down the main walk to the central gate. As they approached it a deep roar went suddenly up from the crowd. It was the king and the Royal family.

Yes, the stout, farmer-looking man was Louis XVI.; the woman with proud uplifted head was Marie Antoinette; the child, that kicked with a boy's careless foot the leaves on the path as they walked, was the dauphin. To what strange fates the little group was moving—to the Temple, to the guillotine!

The dense mass opened to receive them, and they were submerged in a sea of tossing figures, a wild tumult of voices. They reached at last the doors of the National Assembly and disappeared within them.

Napolione had followed the little vanishing group with scornful eyes. He read with swift, unerring judgment the whole significance of the incident.

"It is a surrender," he said; "it is cowardice. This king"—and there was an accent of bitter contempt in the way he pronounced the word—"will not strike a blow for his crown." Then after a moment he added with yet more fiery scorn, "It is a betrayal."

He was looking at the immovable Swiss. They were left, without a leader and without orders, to guard an empty palace. Louis XVI. had forgotten his guards, and the forgetfulness was for them a death-warrant. The crowd was now beating furiously at the gates. The cavalry squadrons were breaking up, the guns stood abandoned; only the Swiss remained moveless in their silent lines.

There came a pin-point of white smoke from the crowd, the sound of a shot. Then followed a tearing sound—the crackle of many shots and a wild tumult of human voices. The people were attacking! Then came the deeper sound of guns from the Carrousel.

The Swiss begin to fall; before ten minutes have passed, dozens dead or dying lie at their comrades' feet. The steady, tormented red line breaks at last into flame and smoke, and the long crackling thunder of platoon-firing dominates all other sounds. The crowd rolls back as if scorched by a wave of flame; the pavement in turn is strewn with fallen bodies. Napolione's eyes gleam. Discipline is overmastering numbers.

But the crowd is in a fighting mood. It is running forward again, silent now, but in deadlier fashion. Napolione's eyes glance impatiently to the guns on the right of the Swiss, but they are silent. The gunners have fled. A cloud of powder-smoke blots out the scene for a moment. There is the sound of furious but irregular musketry, the firing of the crowd; and as

the smoke for a moment lifts there can be seen the mad running to and fro of little groups that are trying to climb the gates or break through them. But within, at the very heart of the smoke and tumult, still come like ordered claps of thunder the volleys of the Swiss.

"They want a leader," the artillery officer at Jean's side is saying afresh; but almost while he speaks the thunder of the rolling volleys dies away. An order to "cease firing" has come to the Swiss. The word runs down the disciplined ranks, one officer calling to another, the sergeants striking up the smoking muskets. The red lines stand silent.

But from the bridges the guns still flash upon them, from every direction the crowd still fires. The unhappy Swiss have ceased to shoot, but not to be shot at. The best troops in the world would be destroyed under such conditions. In a few minutes the steady red lines begin to crumble. The Swiss waver. Some run back into the building; the main body, tormented with incessant musketry fire, moves towards the gate and begins to file through. The crowd closes fiercely on the unfortunate soldiers. They are torn into broken, irregular groups, into flying units—little atoms of red, struck at from every side, stumbling, falling. It is a massacre. Round each red speck the black crowds shut with thrusting points of steel.

Jean had watched the sight with clenched hands and compressed lips. His sympathies were with the gallant, betrayed, ill-fated Swiss. He turned to look at his companion. The frown had gone from his brow; he was watching the scene with a curious look. Here was the birth of a new and terrible energy taking place under his eyes.

"If *they* had a leader!" Napolione was saying, and somehow Jean divined that Napolione's words applied to the crowd. He had assessed the two opposing forces. For him they represented not principles but energies. And he was in the last analysis a mercenary, prepared to take the side of the strongest force, and to sell his brains to it, since its service would open the door of the widest future to him. Jean read enough of his companion's thoughts to shrink from him, chilled and disappointed, but he could hardly realise that at the moment Napolione himself had turned Jacobin.

The crowd by this time had swept into the Tuileries and flooded all its rooms. Wild figures came and went at its windows, the building shook to the sound of musketry shots and to the crash of shattered doors. Furniture was being flung out on to the garden walks. They were witnessing the sacking of a palace.

The two men watched the spectacle for long in silence, then, tired of watching, they forced their way through the crowd. At a street corner they were stopped by a group of citizens drunk with the passion of the fight. They bore aloft on a pike the head of a Swiss; and, stopping passers-by, they compelled them to salute it and to repeat the watchword of the day.

Jean felt his blood take fire at the sight, and he halted with a look of stubbornness on his face. But Bonaparte pulled him on. "*Vive la nation!*" he cried with a gesture of contempt to the wild group with their bloody symbol. "It is only a phrase," he said with scorn. "Would you soil your coat for the sake of a phrase?"

"It is more than a phrase," replied Lawrence stubbornly; "it is a sign of sympathy with murder."

But the only reply of his companion was an impatient shrug of the shoulders.

"I care only for realities," he said.

They walked side by side for some distance. Napolione was preoccupied and silent, and Jean felt his companion's thoughts were moving in some field remote from him. He was trying to read the riddle of the tragedy they had just witnessed. What were the forces at work in this wild scene, and whither were they hurrying? Jean lacked courage to break in on his thoughts.

"What are you doing in Paris?" his companion asked suddenly. "You have no business to be here."

Jean hesitated as he looked at the passionless face of his old schoolmate. Here was a mind over which mere sentiment had no authority. He felt it would be idle to tell his tale or to ask for sympathy. While he hesitated, Napolione turned away with an impatient gesture.

"You have your own secrets; take care they do not cost you your head. I am for Corsica." And, with a gesture of farewell, he moved away and was lost in the crowd.

CHAPTER XIV

ON THE QUEST

JEAN'S first business in Paris was to find out in which of its sixty prisons madame and Denise were, and day after day went by in fruitless search. All the usual means of help had broken down. Lord Gower, the English ambassador, had left Paris without waiting for passports. What diplomatic relations could be kept up with a king who had disappeared behind the doors of the National Assembly, leaving his guards to be massacred and his palace to be plundered? England was served ill at that moment by its secret agents, and those whom Jean approached were either afraid for themselves or jealous of him; they could—or would—give him no help.

Here was a Revolution not yet crystallised into a Government. It represented only an outbreak of distracted passion. The Assembly was under sentence of death, the Convention was not yet born. The one visible governing force was the Commune. Danton was Minister of Justice—if "justice," indeed, survived in the storm-shaken atmosphere of the distracted city. The terrible Committee of Public Safety, with Marat preaching massacre as its "conscience," had not yet emerged.

Paris was a distracted cave of the winds, of winds blowing from very black depths. Black anger was fermenting in every street, with terror for twin-sister. And there is no other human passion so cruel as terror.

The fear shaking all the nerves of Paris—that city of nerves—at the moment seemed, it must be confessed, to have some reason for its existence. The city, so to speak, was on tiptoes listening for the sound of hostile guns beyond the horizon; the guns of the Prussians at Longwei, of the Austrians at Thionville, or of Brunswick (with an army of seventy thousand, it was even whispered of twice that number) marching through the Argonne Passes on Paris. France was girdled with fire. Vendée was rising. In Paris itself, as terror whispered, there were thirty thousand aristocrats not yet in prison.

The gay, guilty, passion-torn city felt itself hurrying on to some dark and unguessed fate. The very air seemed shaken with strange sounds. It tells the mad nature of the times to remember that if the representatives of the sections set the blade of the guillotine moving fast, their own necks in turn went beneath its stroke. Of the hundred and forty-four members of the first Commune, no less than ninety-six—or two out of every three—perished by the guillotine. The Revolution devoured its offspring quickly in those days.

Amid these wild scenes and the play of these strange forces, Jean wandered with a sense of helplessness. He watched from the pavement the doors of the Hôtel de Ville, and tried to recognise the figures that passed in and out, for all authority at the moment was in their hands. He saw there, once, the dark face of Duclos, looking more darkly mysterious than ever.

Lepitre, too, with a tri-coloured sash round his waist—he recognised him by his goggle eyes. Jean had a kindly feeling for his old teacher, but he knew he was not to be trusted.

The third day, however, Jean saw Toulan, with official scarf and an air of authority, coming down the steps of the Hôtel de Ville. He liked the talkative and impulsive Southerner in spite of his restless eyes. His temper was daring. He had no concealments. He might refuse to help, but he would not betray. Jean made inquiries, and found that Toulan had given up his shop and become an active member of the Jacobin Club, where his fearless temper gave him great influence. He had been elected a member of the Commune, and was one of the leaders in the attack on the Tuileries. He had an office in a narrow and winding lane near the Hôtel de Ville.

Jean watched outside this office one morning till Toulan emerged, then, following him, touched him on the shoulder. Toulan swung sharply round, almost as if the touch of Jean's finger had been the prick of a sword, for French nerves were sensitive in such times. His quick eyes ran swiftly over Jean's face and figure.

"The Englander!" he cried.

Jean nodded, with a smile, in answer.

"What are you doing here?" asked Toulan suspiciously.

"Not conspiring against the Commune," Jean replied with a laugh.

Toulan had been scrutinising him. "No, you are honest, you always were honest. You have not brains enough for a conspirator," he added with a laugh, for Jean's face wore once more its mask of dullness.

"Madame," said Jean, by way of explanation, "has been arrested."

"And does that distress you? She was no friend of yours. She was always a Girondist, and she was accused of meddling with Royalist plots. The Republic must strike its foes."

"But Denise," said Jean quietly, "she, too, is arrested. Does the Republic make war on children?"

"No," said Toulan with a curse. "That little one! What fool sent her to prison?"

Toulan was, in his hot, Southern fashion, keenly sympathetic. He trusted Jean, and readily undertook to find out in which of the prisons madame lay.

"She is in the Abbaye," he told Jean when they met next day. "Your old enemy M. Duclos turned against her when her money was gone, and betrayed her."

Toulan shook his head decisively when Jean asked if he could obtain an order to see madame. The days of careless guard and of easy access to the *detenus* were gone. Every prison-door in Paris was guarded at that moment by stronger bars than iron. Suspicion and hate kept watch there, and darker shapes than even these. If Jean applied for an order to visit madame the application would be taken for a proof of sympathy, and he would himself be promptly arrested.

Toulan, however, was willing to help Jean as far as possible. He supplied him with a civic card—of red, as an inhabitant of Paris; not of white, as a stranger—which any patrol might require him to produce, and without which he could sleep in safety under no roof in the city. He warned him, too, that on an afternoon which he named every house in Paris was to be

searched. All citizens were required to be within doors till the officers examined the rooms in each house. A net with meshes so fine that no fugitive could escape was to be flung over the whole city. But Toulan explained that as he was himself to conduct the search in the quartier where Jean lodged he would be safe.

Paris has seen strange sights, but not many stranger than it saw that afternoon. All traffic ceased, the streets were silent and empty. The population of a whole city sat under its roofs waiting inspection.

Jean sat in his room till, with sharp rattle of drum and tramp of feet, the search-party came down the street examining each house in turn. Presently the searchers came to the room where he sat. Toulan was at their head.

"I know this citizen," he said in a peremptory voice, "and will answer for him." And the searchers went on their way.

Jean's problem was how to communicate with the prisoners in the Abbaye, and over this puzzle he meditated for days. He trod the filthy pavements in its neighbourhood till he grew footsore. He hung round its gate watching—with eyes sometimes dim with pity, but more often keen with anger—the little groups of "suspects," haggard men and pale-faced women, being hurried in, till he began to wonder when the sad procession would end. But no chance of communicating with madame and Denise offered itself, and more than one rough challenge showed Jean he was beginning to attract suspicion to himself.

At last there shone a gleam of hope. Watching

outside the great prison one morning, Jean saw an official coming through the gates. It was a shambling figure, with legs disproportionately short. In the rodent-like face, with its pointed chin and eyes set close together, and generally furtive air, there was something familiar. A second glance showed Jean that it was his old acquaintance the Rat.

Jean followed him till a quiet part of the street was reached, then, quickening his steps, he whispered in the Rat's ear the once familiar password of his band. The Rat swung round, and as his ferret eyes dwelt on Jean's face there broke out in them a light of gladness and even of affection.

"*L'Anglais!*" he cried.

"Yes," said Jean with a laugh, "and what has become of the Rats?"

They had, it seemed, broken up. Their leader explained he had taken to politics, and the lessons he had learned in the forays and strategems of the Rats had served him well in this new field. He was, he proudly said, one of the more important officers in the great prison.

"Madame is there?" asked Jean eagerly.

"Yes, she is there, but you would not know her. Her hair has turned white. She is ill. I think she's dying."

"And Denise?" asked Jean with a beating heart.

"Ah, the brave little one!" said the Rat. "She takes care of her mother."

When Jean suggested that he might obtain access to the prison the Rat shook his head energetically. No visit to the prison was possible for Jean except as a prisoner. He knew his influence over the Rat,

and exerted it to the utmost, but in vain. He would carry a note to Denise, but it must bear neither name nor address. He would permit Jean only to write a few impersonal and colourless syllables that could arouse no suspicion.

Jean wrote the letter with the hope that Denise's quick wit would guess from whom it came; but he was struck with the Rat's disquiet as he talked of the prison, and it left on Jean's mind the sense that some tragedy was gathering over the gloomy building and the prisoners within its walls.

CHAPTER XV

A DISTRACTED CITY

PARIS at that moment was a stage on which a thousand passions—some noble but many base, some heroic but not a few devilish—were set all in wildest activity. Tragedy and comedy jostled each other in every street, and Jean saw with wondering eyes a thousand strange sights.

An official with a brilliant red scarf round his waist was strutting majestically down the street one morning, with a little squad of newly enlisted soldiers behind him. A carriage splashed by too near, and threw some mud on his coat. He stopped, drew himself up majestically, and signalled the coachman with a gesture to stop.

"France," he announced in pompous tones, "needs horses to draw her cannon."

At his bidding the traces were unloosed and the horses led off, leaving the carriage stranded, with a stout lady leaning from the window screaming vain appeals, and the astonished coachman, with the useless reins still in his hand, on the box. But the splash of mud was avenged!

A little farther on a crowd was pulling down the

iron railing in front of the Luxembourg, and carrying the rails to some improvised forges near, where they were being beaten with furious haste into pikes, all with loud clamour of voices and much useless running to and fro on the part of everybody.

On the slopes of Montmartre, Jean found a huge crowd plying spade and pick with frantic industry, a number of members of the National Assembly, with tri-coloured scarves round their waists, amongst the number. Paris was to be girdled with trenches against the approaching Prussians. But there was no method in the industry of the crowd, and no continuity. The next day, when Jean visited the spot, the crowd, including the members of the Assembly, with their scarves, had vanished like a flock of alarmed birds, and the abandoned shovels lay in the half-dug trenches.

Paris was a city of impulses, a reed shaken by many winds, and winds which blew sometimes in wildly opposite directions. And meanwhile the hungry queues, as the autumn evenings fell, gathered at the doors of the bakers' shops to wait till morning for the daily distribution of bread.

The great room in the Hôtel de Ville, where a committee of the Commune was in permanent session, was the one centre of governing energy, and here the stage for the human drama transacting itself was always set, and always crowded with gesticulating figures. Jean stood in the hall one afternoon and watched with amazed eyes the whole scene.

Round a table in the centre sat ten or eleven men. Some had sabres at their side, all had red caps on their heads. A constant restlessness shook them. Two or

three would speak at once, and they addressed the spectators as often as they addressed each other. One or another was continually leaving the table to confer with somebody in the crowd, and then running back to the table. A fever seemed to burn in their very blood and to forbid them to be quiet.

But the figure in the centre was darkly formidable. He was little more than a dwarf in height, but with broad shoulders, short neck, and huge head. His body was thin, and as he moved from the table it could be seen that his legs were twisted. His face was strong-featured, with flattened nose and twitching lips. The eyes, beneath the black, slanting eyebrows, had a curious gleam of yellow. The inflamed eyelids had a perpetually restless and snapping movement. The skin was blotched as though with disease, the hair uncombed, the chin bristly. Jean somehow felt a chill run through his blood as he watched this figure.

"Who is he?" he asked of one standing by.

"It is Jean Paul Marat," was the answer, in tones of surprise, "the friend of the people, the keeper of the people's conscience," he added, using a phrase which had just become popular.

Deputations, composed of the oddest materials and on the oddest errands, thrust themselves continually on the attention of the Committee. An official in a soiled red cap, a blouse, and ragged striped trousers had it as his business to introduce each deputation in turn, but in most cases the deputation insisted on introducing itself, and did it with many independent voices. Jean watched the whole spectacle as if it were a procession of comedies; but always there was the sense that behind the comedy, so unconscious of its

own ridiculous aspect, were the dark forces of a hurrying tragedy.

One deputation came in to the sound of music. Its members wore the robes of priests, and carried crosses and a banner. But the little band at the head of the procession was playing one of the wild tunes of the street, and in front of the table, behind which sat the Committee, the priests threw down stole and chasuble and dalmatic, while others put down their certificates of ordination on the table itself. They came to renounce their priesthood. The crowd broke into a frenzy of approving cries, and the priests and the members of the Committee embraced each other across the table.

Another deputation was of a more practical character. It consisted of a gang of workmen equipped with spades, saucepans, and pickaxes. The craze of the moment was to extract saltpetre for gunpowder from the floors of cellars and stables. This particular group was on its way to this task, and dropped into the Hôtel de Ville, on the road, to proclaim their patriotic intentions with *vivats* and embraces.

Another group, which Jean somehow found pathetic, was a little rustic company from a village called Rex. They carried a rusty iron cross, and explained that it represented the overthrown shrine of the patron saint of the village, who had been deposed and replaced by a statue of Brutus. The name of the village, the deputation complained indignantly, was aristocratic, and they asked that it might be changed to "Brutus," a request that was granted with enthusiasm.

A deputation of women appeared, bringing various

gifts of a feminine sort for the service of the commonwealth. Some of them put ornaments on the table, others scissors and thimbles. One matron placed on the table a little girl, aged seven or eight, who solemnly produced her savings and laid them on the altar of her country in the shape of the rough hand of Marat. The mother explained that her daughter could both sing and recite, and the committee was offered the choice of hearing the Rights of Man recited or a popular song on the martyrs of liberty sung. For once, however, the members of the Committee were impatient, and the red-sashed little girl had to be consoled by a paternal kiss from the chairman.

Jean watched the two faces as they touched—the bristly chin of Marat, the tender lips of the child. What strange opposites, symbolic of still wilder extremes, had met in the world-tragedy of the Revolution!

The last deputation that arrived while Jean watched was perhaps on the strangest errand of all. A citizen, who groaned under the name of St. Chamant, appeared with his wife and children, asking that the whole family might be *un*baptised, so that the last stain of superstition should be purged from them, and that he and his wife might be temporarily divorced and immediately remarried by civic rite under new names.

This astonishing ceremony was duly performed. In the name of the nation each member of the little group was declared to be purged of baptism. The proud father was named Aristides, the wife Atride, the eldest son Regulus, the daughter—a little girl of four—was labelled with the alarming title of Révolutionnaire.

The eruptions of oratory which attended all these performances were numerous and fiery, but when Marat spoke the effect was startling. His voice was thin, but it had a curious ringing quality. Some defect of the twisted mouth made his pronunciation defective, but his voice had the edge and hardness of a sword-blade, and his sentences hissed with anger as he talked of poor Louis XVI.—"this brigand, perjurer, conspirator, without honour and without soul."

Night was darkening over the great building, the long passages were black with shadows, the gloomy hall was lit with a few candles, but still the tragi-comedy of the Revolution was in progress, the passions and follies of the crowd were eddying round the table where the Committee sat, as Jean forced his way through the crowd into the street and drew a deep breath of the keen September air.

Above the huddled roofs and the foul lanes of the city, black with coming night, rose the pure evening sky, a concave of darkest purple, pricked with a few pin-points of white, the white of the kindling stars. In the west the last glow of a splendid sunset was dying in hues of amethyst and primrose. How could the heavens be so clean and calm above while the earth beneath was so stormy and dark?

CHAPTER XVI

RED SUNDAY

It was Sunday. But no tread of hastening feet in the streets of Paris told of gathering congregations; no harmonies of chanted psalms, no wail of lamenting litany rose in the churches. It was to be a devil's Sabbath, a day of evil memory for all time. It was September 2, the blackest day in the calendar of the Revolution—an almanac so full of mingled light and darkness.

Jean wandered restlessly through the streets that day, conscious of a strange disquiet lying upon him which he could not explain. He had so far failed completely in the business which brought him to Paris. A dim feeling that events were moving swiftly to some dreadful crisis possessed him, yet the sense of helplessness lay upon him like a paralysis.

Early in the morning he betook himself to the Hôtel de Ville, hoping to meet Toulan; but the great building wore a darkly silent aspect. The Committee sat with shut doors. There were no deputations, no crowds of garrulous spectators. Jean caught a glimpse of Marat's crooked legs climbing the steps to the great door, which opened to receive him and was shut again

instantly; and the sight of his broad, evil face, with its projecting chin, its blotched cheeks, and its dishevelled hair, disquieted him. The fierce yellow eyes beneath the slanting eyebrows had a fixed and preoccupied stare. It was as though they were held by some dark picture drawn on the very air.

Little groups came up to the door from time to time and were admitted; but they were strangers to Jean, and quite unlike the ordinary spectators. They represented a new and evil type. In face and dress they recalled to Jean the half-savage inhabitants of the cellars along the bank of the Seine—a race as dangerous and fierce as the wild beasts of an African forest. What dark errand brought them to the Hôtel de Ville? Was some secret and bloody plot on foot, and were they its instruments?

Jean hurried to the Abbaye; but there, again, the great gates were jealously shut and silent. At noon the sullen boom of a gun sent a wave of sound across the streets of Paris. It was an alarm-gun; but of what it was the signal Jean could not guess. Presently, as if in answer, there rose in the air, and from every point of the compass in turn, the sound of the tocsin shaking the atmosphere with its harsh call. Still the city seemed motionless. The streets were empty. Jean felt as if some nightmare lay upon them.

Late in the afternoon he betook himself again to the Abbaye. As he came near it he was disquieted to find all the approaches blocked by a silent and staring multitude. A French crowd usually wraps itself in noise as in a garment, but this was strangely hushed. All faces were turned towards the gate of the great prison; many were white and rigid as if with horror.

Each man seemed to be unconscious of his neighbour's presence. They were spectators of some dreadful scene which held them spellbound.

Jean forced his way through the crowd, and at the spectacle before him its mood of silent horror fell upon him. The whole space in front of the Abbaye gate was strewn with dead bodies lying in a hundred attitudes of flight and terror, as if death had come upon them suddenly and in some pursuing and dreadful shape. The dead, as their dress showed, were chiefly priests. At the entrance of the prison was an armed guard in civilian dress and red caps. The gates themselves were open, so that the great court within could be seen. In it was a crowd of some two hundred men, with pikes and swords, grouped in a ragged curve in front of the main door opening from the building. Jean saw, with a shudder, that the pikes above the red caps were crimson with blood. What explained that red stain on so many steel points?

As he stared with uncomprehending eyes the door opened, a hoarse voice cried, "*À la Force!*" and a struggling figure was thrust out. The red pikes fell to the level of a charge, the guard in the court closed fiercely to the centre, there was a forest of brandished and thrusting arms; a wild, broken, long-drawn shriek rent the shuddering air, while a wave of emotion swept through the watching crowd around Jean. Then he suddenly understood. The darker forces of the Revolution had thrust aside the existing tribunals, and were setting up a fierce, swift, unpitying judgment-bench of their own. They were "purging the prisons." It all grew intelligible to Jean as, with blood half-frozen with horror, he stared at the dreadful sight. All the

passions of the Revolution were here brought to an evil climax.

Always the forces in it making for violence had conquered the forces resisting violence. The Tiers État had captured the States-General; the Girondists had been overthrown by the Mountain. The Jacobins outraved the Cordeliers and crushed them. And now the Commune had thrust aside the municipality, the National Assembly was in the fierce clutch of the Convention.

All the conditions of the moment were on the side of the extremists. The terror on the frontier reacted on the terror at the heart of France and made it pitiless. It was true that Danton was Minister of Justice—a sufficiently grim and ruthless guardian of the law, it might have been supposed; but even under Danton "justice" was too slow for terror-shaken Paris. The blade of the guillotine was not plied fast enough. What Jean looked at was the work of a rude, fierce, half-lunatic tribunal called into existence by the group round Marat and reflecting their madness. Paris was obeying the law of all revolutions.

Jean stood long, looking with white face and troubled eyes at the bodies of the dead, at the gate with its fierce guards, at the wild scene beyond. The crisis he feared had come suddenly and in a shape more terrific than anything he had imagined. The fate of Denise—he hardly thought of her mother—would be determined within the next hour. She might be submerged beneath this wave of murder, and he was helpless.

Presently he turned, forced his way through the crowd, and ran at speed along the empty streets. He

passed long lines of houses with shut doors and drawn blinds, as though those within knew that a tragedy was on foot and refused to look on it.

Jean must find Toulan. He alone could open a way through the gates of the Abbaye, where murder and terror kept watch. But even while Jean ran his feet seemed heavy as lead. What might not happen in that dark prison before he returned? Just as, breathless with haste, he reached Toulan's house, the door opened, and Toulan himself came out. He had on his official scarf, a strange gravity lay on his usually reckless features.

Jean, in hurried accents, began to explain what was happening, but with a gesture Toulan stopped him; he seemed to know, and Jean felt, as he realised this, a chill run through his blood. The crime on foot was no casual thing, it had been deliberately planned. It even had official sanction. Was Toulan a party to it?

But he was quickly reassured.

"Come," said the Frenchman, "we must save *la petite*," and he began to walk swiftly in the direction of the Abbaye.

It was no time for words, and without another syllable both hurried on their errand. They reached the crowd, which still stood in the same fixed and horrified silence opposite the gates of the prison, and in a masterful fashion Toulan broke his way through it. He was recognised by the guard, and, closely followed by Jean, passed into the court. His official scarf—and his abrupt, commanding speech almost more than his scarf—won them entrance. It was growing dark by this time, but a dozen flaring torches lit up the court with an uncertain light. The massacre, disguised in

the forms of law, was in full process. The heap of bodies on the reddened pavement was higher than when Jean saw it before.

Just as they entered the court the prison-door was opened, and the cry, "*À la Force!*"—the death-sentence—was heard again. The doomed figure this time was that of a Swiss—an officer in a blue coat with epaulettes. A torch was thrust so near his face as almost to scorch it, and in the light the features were for a moment vividly seen. Jean never forgot that face—the bristling moustache, the retracted lips that showed the white teeth, the narrowed eyes that fluttered to and fro like those of an animal. The face was that of a brave man, but of a brave man looking suddenly on death, and on death wearing a mask of murder. A score of darting steel points smote him; with a gesture of up-flung arms the Swiss took the thrusts, a few staggering steps, and he fell.

Jean would have stopped, held with horror at the sight, but Toulan caught him by the arm and pulled him to a side door, by which they entered. "We have no time to waste," he whispered.

They stumbled along a dark passage, and reached the hall where the self-appointed tribunal sat. Some dozen men were round a table, on which were papers, a couple of inkstands, half-a-dozen pipes, and as many bottles. Some of the judges had jackets and aprons on, some were standing, some sitting, all wore red caps. Behind, half-hidden in the gloom, were sleeping figures lying on the benches.

The president of this strange tribunal—an extraordinarily tall man in a gray coat, with a sabre by his side—was half-sitting on the table. He nodded

carelessly to Toulan, who addressed him as "Citizen Maillard." A man at either end of the great table held a torch in his hand. At the door opposite the table stood a turnkey with his hand on the bolts; two others, in shirt-sleeves stained with blood, guarded the great door opening on the court with drawn sabres.

A prisoner had just been brought in, a guard holding each arm and one behind grasping the collar of his coat.

"Your name, your profession," said the president sternly. "The least falsehood will destroy you."

Then he took up a sheet on which was written the name of each prisoner and the charge against him, and listened while, with a catch in his breath at almost every syllable, the poor wretch before him tried to answer his questions.

Messengers came and went while the trial went on. Some of the judges left the table, chatted with the onlookers, and then came back again. The trial was stopped more than once to settle some foreign matter in debate. Presently the judge impatiently plucked off his cap.

"Citizens, we have heard enough. What is your sentence?"

"*À la Force!*" shouted one of the judges.

The rest were silent, the president nodded; the guards holding the unfortunate prisoner hurried him to the door, and Jean heard the fatal words shouted hoarsely to the crowd of executioners outside. So the terrific drama went on. Here was justice reduced to its elements.

CHAPTER XVII

THE TRIAL

As he stood and watched the figures that came and went in the broken light of the torches, Jean caught a glimpse of the Rat, who was one of the turnkeys of the prison. But he tried in vain to arrest the eye of his old comrade. That the Rat recognised him Jean did not doubt, but fear prevented any signs of recognition being given. Presently, however, he brushed closely past Jean and whispered in his ear, "*La petite* comes next. I knew you would come, and I kept her back."

Then he hurried away. Jean stood watching the door, with a strange weight on his heart.

It was his plan—he could, in the agitation and hurry of events, think of no other—to make some passionate appeal to the judges; but as he looked at them his heart fell. Their faces were as hard as granite. Human lives to them were only counters in the great game of the Revolution. They would not risk the game for the sake of allowing one of the human "counters" to escape. And Jean realised, as he studied their countenances, that here were men carried out of themselves by great forces. They had the glittering eyes, the hurrying speech, the iron resolve of

fanatics. Human nature shaken with lunatic terrors, or on fire with wild and vain hopes, can be strangely pitiless; and the men who sat round the table in the room at the Abbaye that wild night were in this mood. Jean had counted on Toulan; but as he glanced at his face he could see that Toulan himself had given up hope. The current ran too fiercely and was too strong for him to wrestle with it.

The moments seemed to creep past on leaden feet. At last the turnkey drew back the bolt, and madame was led betwixt two guards. Amid all the horrors of that night Jean was startled by the change in her appearance. Her hair was gray, her features drawn. The beauty of the clear complexion and the deep star-like eyes had vanished. Fear had written its dark hieroglyphics on every line of her face. She walked with dragging feet, like a woman who had been drugged, leaning heavily on one of her guards, and was apparently only half-conscious of the scene about her.

But Jean cast only one hurrying glance upon that picture of wrecked beauty. He saw Denise! Her face was strangely pale and thin; but the tender lips were firm, the pure eyes were bright and alert. Her glance fell upon Jean; and as their eyes met her steps were half-arrested, but it was only for a moment. She stepped to the front with quick, light feet, put her slender hand on the table, and leaned forward. Her eyes ran quickly to and fro upon the countenances of the judges, and as she did so a sudden silence fell on the group about the table. A face so young, so sweet, and yet so brave suddenly emerging from the confusion and terrors of the night startled them. Its clear purity visibly acted on them like some touch of magic.

They felt for the moment as if *they* were on their trial.

Denise was fighting for her mother's life, and every sense was alert.

"Monsieur," she said, "of what is my mother accused!"

The sweet voice deepened the effect of the pure face and the clear eyes. The president took up the sheet on the table before him and examined it.

"She is accused by the People of conspiring against France."

"Never!" cried Denise in a tone of proud scorn. "Never! She has served France. She has suffered for France."

"But she lived in England," said the president, "and married an Englishman. She is in the pay of Pitt."

"My mother married a noble Englishman, for love knows nothing of nationalities; and she sacrificed her happiness for France. She has served it against England. If she were in England to-day its prisons would open their doors for her."

At this moment Toulan leaned over and whispered something to the president.

"Why are you here?" asked the president, looking at Denise. "Your name is not in the list."

"I have never been accused. It is not by any warrant I am detained. I became a prisoner because I am a daughter, and the place of a daughter is by her mother's side. If the friends of the king had triumphed, and you, monsieur, were in prison, would you not wish your daughter to plead for you?"

She seemed a creature compounded of air and fire,

so slender and light, and yet so swift and clear and fearless. Here was love in its highest terms—love that forgot itself, that was on fire with pity and courage.

"France knows nothing of fathers and daughters," said the president after a brief pause. "She knows only her friends and her enemies."

"But my mother is the friend and servant of France."

"That is true," said Toulan, breaking in on the dialogue. "This woman, it is known, was the agent of France in England, and Pitt, if he could, would lay hands upon her. Whoever accused her," he went on loudly, "is doing the work of Pitt."

"Eh?" said one of the judges, a little red-headed man with sharp features and huge round spectacles. He peered forward, and looked steadily at the haggard face of madame. "Yes," he said, "I was in the Foreign Office, and the prisoner was certainly employed in its service in London. Some papers of value to France were obtained, and madame had to flee from London or she would have been arrested."

"Shall your hands do Pitt's work against a true Frenchwoman?" asked Denise, as her eyes ran keenly along the faces of the judges in turn, and her voice was keener than her glance. "There was no complaint in Paris against *ma mère;* it was in London she was accused."

The judges put their heads together and held a whispered conference. One after another, in turn, looked at the haggard, broken woman, leaning half-swooning on the shoulder of the turnkey who held her, then at the slender figure of Denise, with her pure face and steady eyes.

"The testimony of Citizen Toulan," said the judge, "clears your mother." Then he took off his cap. "France admires good daughters.—I see nothing to condemn in the accused. Do you agree?" he asked, turning to his fellow-judges.

The swift, strange drama had drawn the attention of all in the room, and at the president's words they broke out into loud "Bravos."

"This woman," said the president, "may go free."

"Give her a certificate to that effect," suggested Toulan.

The president drew a sheet of paper to him, and wrote on it swiftly but with care, consulting more than once with the little red-headed judge as to some phrase. When he had finished he read it aloud with visible relish. It ran:

"At the Abbaye, year four of Liberty and first of Equality: We, commissionnaires appointed by the People to try the prisoners detained in the Abbaye, have made to appear before us, this 2nd September, the woman Thiebault, accused of conspiring against France. We have found the accusation to be false, and have declared her innocent in the presence of the People, who applauded the liberation which she received from us. We invite all citizens to grant her aid and protection." (Signed) "MAILLARD."

Judges and turnkeys broke into a murmur of applause. They enjoyed the sonorous phrases. This terrible tribunal could talk, if need required, in the accents of the ordinary courts.

Then the president thrust the paper into the hand of Denise. "Discharge the prisoner," he cried.

The guards led madame to the door, Denise holding her dress with her left hand, her right by this time was in Jean's grasp. For a moment the group stood on the threshold looking down on the court. It was strewn with dead bodies. In front, with the light of torches falling on their sabres and pikes, was the crowd of executioners.

"Hats off, citizens!" cried one of the guards. "Behold her for whom your judges request aid and protection."

"*Vive la nation!*" shouted the crowd.

"I want four honest citizens who will conduct this innocent woman to her home."

Several at once ran forward, but Jean still held to the hand of Denise, and was accepted as one of the four. Two of them secured torches and they proceeded to cross the court. They had not reached the centre when a side door opened. There ran—or rather leaped—out the wild figure of a naked man, his white skin showing the red marks of many pike-wounds. He fell, struggled to his feet again, and ran on with fierce gestures and stumbling feet. Three men with gleaming pikes were pursuing him.

"Madame is dying!" Toulan cried suddenly.

Denise, before her eyes had taken in the scene, turned at the sound and threw her arms about her mother. The adroit Southerner shouted the words in order to save the girl from seeing the bloody picture.

"Let us get away from this place," Jean whispered, "or the sight will kill them."

The little group hurried on again. As they neared the gate the light of the torches fell on a figure that seemed in strange contrast with the scene about him.

His dress was rich; he wore a small puce coat, a black wig, and an official scarf.

"It is Billaud de Varennes," whispered Toulan to Jean, "the deputy of the attorney of the Commune."

The figure in the puce coat walked composedly over the dead bodies lying in the court.

"Citizens," he said in a loud voice, "you are doing your duty. You have destroyed a set of scoundrels. France owes you eternal gratitude, and the municipality will know how to make a return to you. I am deputed to offer each of you twenty-four livres, which are to be paid to you immediately. Continue your work," he cried, "and the country will be grateful."

In the records of the Commune is still preserved a document which shows that the promise of the man in the puce coat and the black wig was kept.

Meanwhile, the group with madame and Denise had struggled through the crowd. A carriage was secured, but whither was the unfortunate woman to be driven?

"Let her come," said Toulan after a moment's hesitation, "to my house. My wife will take care of her."

When they reached his house the guards were dismissed, and Toulan's wife, with the help of Denise, carried off the sick woman to her room.

Then Toulan broke into a shout of delight. "Ah, it was wonderful! It was clever! *La petite* is wonderful! To bring in Pitt! The one name those men hate as much as they hate the Capet."

For three days the flame of life fluttered in madame's breast, and then went suddenly out. The months of imprisonment, the terrors that had hung

around her day and night like a garment of flame, the wild scene in the Abbaye, were too much for a nature that had in it so much of the butterfly. She never fully recovered consciousness. Jean saw her once. As her glance fell on him dark memories in the dying woman's brain seemed to awaken. A strange and inscrutable expression stole into her eyes. It might have been remorse—Jean could not interpret it. It was the symbol of feelings to which he had no key.

When she died, and the furtive, hurried funeral was over, Denise was left alone. She and Jean had not exchanged many words. Every moment had been given to the dying woman. But now, as the two sat together, the sad eyes of the poor girl shone with gratitude.

"Oh, Jean," she said, "how good you were to come to us!"

"I did nothing by coming," he answered ruefully. "I stood like a fool in that dreadful room at the Abbaye. I meant to have spoken, though my blundering lips could not have helped you. But you gave us no time. You fought your own battle, Denise; you shamed us all." And he looked with new wonder at the girlish figure that had played so brave a part in that wild scene.

A faint colour stole into the poor girl's cheeks at his words. "Ah, I forgot everything except my poor mother, broken-hearted and gray-haired, and about to be flung to the pikes," and her eyes kindled afresh with a flame of courage as she recalled the scene. "But, Jean," she whispered softly, "you helped me."

"I?" he asked, in wondering tones.

"Yes. Do you remember giving me this," and she

drew from a fold in her dress a little battered book with broken covers. It was the Bible Jean had given her in that midnight scene on the stairs in madame's house. "If I had no other companion in the Abbaye I had this book. And, oh, how it talked to me! And that dreadful night when we knew murder was on foot, and were waiting to be called in our turn, I saw poor mother could say nothing on her own behalf. I was thinking what plea I could urge for her, and I saw in the book this," and she held up the page to Jean, "*It shall be given you in that hour*," the words ran, "*what ye shall say*." "I knew it was a message," said Denise, as her eyes kindled and her cheeks flushed, "and it *was* given me."

Whether Denise's use of the text would have satisfied an unimaginative theologian may be doubted; but Jean at least accepted it with implicit confidence. The great words of the Bible are, in hours of supreme need, renewed in their application to each human soul in turn, and through all the centuries.

"But, Jean," Denise said, looking at him with grateful eyes, "you were good to come and risk your life for us. For we had no claim on you. M. Duclos turned mother's heart against you. You were cruelly wronged, and in the Abbaye mother saw it, and grieved over it. She would not talk about it. She never told me why you were hated, or what the plans of M. Duclos were. Perhaps I guessed," and the poor girl broke into a passion of sobs.

The question had to be settled as to her future, and there was no time for delay. Of one thing Jean was clear. Paris was no place for her. He would take her to London. He had already written to his aunt, saying

that madame was certainly dying, and he must bring Denise to Portman Square. Mrs. Robert Lawrence read the letter with grimly shut lips. She could not yet forgive Denise for being the daughter of her mother.

Toulan energetically approved of the plan. "We shall have darker days yet in Paris. It will be no place for anybody with English blood or English connections. You must both go."

With his command of the secret agents of the English Foreign Office, Jean had no trouble in reaching the French coast, and crossing to England. As they drove to Portman Square he looked at Denise. The heroine of the Abbaye had shrunk to a pale-faced girl with quivering lips and shaking nerves.

"You fear my aunt," he said, "more than you did the judges in the dreadful room that night."

"Ah, that was different," she sighed, and would say no more.

Mrs. Robert Lawrence first fell on John's neck and kissed him again and again with energy. "You brave, foolish boy!" she said.

Then she turned and looked with what were meant to be coldly questioning eyes at Denise. But the girlish face—all purity and sweetness—the wistful eyes, the trembling hands and lips, were too much for Mrs. Lawrence. She took Denise to her arms without a word; and with the gesture of a tired child the poor girl put her head on Mrs. Lawrence's shoulder.

"This child is going to be ill," Mrs. Lawrence announced, and swept her away into her own bedroom.

Illness came in an obstinate and severe form. For weeks Denise lay betwixt life and death. Through the

chambers of the unconscious girl's brain all the terrible figures of the Abbaye came and went in unceasing procession. Never was nurse more tender or patient than Mrs. Lawrence. She plucked Denise from the very touch of death. Henceforward she had an absurd, jealous, and yet tender sense of absolute proprietorship in the girl. Madame faded completely out of existence. Denise's history, as far as Mrs. Lawrence was concerned, began from the moment when she had put her arms round the girl's neck on the night Jack brought her to Portman Square.

CHAPTER XVIII

CHANGES

As a result of his Paris experiences, Jack Lawrence found himself suddenly become of official importance. A halo of romance hung about him. He had seen close at hand the new and terrible forces that had suddenly broken loose and were filling Europe with dread. He was questioned and cross-questioned by one eminent official after another.

Lord Granville, the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, sent for him and heard his tale. Fox listened to his story with compressed lips and dreamy eyes. He was impatient of the mere details of the September massacres. Behind the wild scenes that, during those terrible days, the Abbaye and a dozen other prisons in Paris had witnessed, he could discern the forces that produced them, and the political goal towards which they were hurrying France. And while he frowned at the immediate incidents of the bloody drama he sympathised with the goal beyond them towards which the nation was blindly struggling.

Robert Lawrence, who, like many Englishmen of his time, was frightened out of his Whiggism into Conservative politics by the dreadful shapes the Revolution took, shook his head.

"What excuse is possible," he asked, "for the massacre of the prisoners? It is the Jacquerie once more; and this time the Jacquerie is in the seat of government itself."

"It is the price France pays," was Fox's answer, "for deliverance. You can measure the weight of the oppression by the energy of the recoil."

One morning, as he sat in his room, a message came to Jack that Mr. Pitt wished to see him. That the Prime Minister should "wish to see" a junior clerk in the Foreign Office was a very unusual circumstance, and Jack obeyed the call with some nervousness. Pitt sat alone in his room, and young Lawrence looked, with the respect the great commoner never failed to inspire, on the strong, half-melancholy face with deep lines of care ploughed on every feature, the eyes so steady and full, the hair brushed back from the great forehead, the firm lips with their downward, half-sad curve, the full rounded chin, the turned-up nose—"turned up at all mankind," as one of his enemies said. Somehow Jack felt the great Prime Minister was a lonely figure; majestic, perhaps, but solitary.

Pitt listened to the young fellow's story, and put a few brief questions that went to the heart of things. Jack was shrewd enough to realise how different was Pitt's point of view from that of Fox. To Pitt the French Revolution would have been an irrelevance if it had not been a disaster. He was nursing England back into strength from the tragedy of the war in which she lost both her colonies and her fame; and the French Revolution threatened to fatally arrest the healing process. All the economies dear to his financial genius, and all the great reforms which his sane and practical

mind was planning, must go to wreck if the fire raging on the banks of the Seine spread to other lands.

Pitt's interest in Jack's story was that of a duellist anxious to learn the methods of his coming antagonist. Here were new and strange forces stirring the world's politics; and it was only too certain that he was on the verge of a conflict with them which would be Titanic in scale. He wanted to measure them, to learn their direction, and assess their energy. How they might affect France did not greatly concern Pitt. He was an Englishman first and last; the sole question for him was how England would be affected.

Fox saw—dimly perhaps, and as though through some golden haze, but he *did* see—the far-off goal to which these events were hurrying France. Pitt's vision was of things that lay nearer. He discerned the struggle which the older nations must wage with revolutionary France, and what the struggle would cost.

Pitt presently fell into a muse, and Jack waited respectfully, trying to guess what thoughts were behind that strong and melancholy face. After a while Pitt roused himself.

"Mr. Lawrence," he said, "your talk has interested me. You seem to have been lucky in Paris. If we send you there again I hope you will be as fortunate."

There was a hint of promotion and of higher service in the words which set all Jack's nerves tingling.

During the weeks that followed there came in swift and almost breathless succession the shock of one great event in Paris after another. The Revolution was hastening to its climax. Europe at the end of the eighteenth century resembled nothing so much as a

medieval building with dry rot in all its timbers, and the French Revolution was a fire suddenly breaking out at its heart and filling the whole building with its smoke and heat.

The newly born Convention had proclaimed France a Republic on September 21, while John was yet in Paris. Four weeks later it issued a decree promising help to all nations that "desired to be free." It was a proclamation of war against all existing Governments. In January the king was beheaded. France, in Danton's phrase, had flung down as its gage of battle to all the great Powers the head of a king. The revolutionary armies were everywhere triumphant. Belgium was annexed; the Scheldt was proclaimed open, and by that act a dozen treaties were cancelled. On February 1 war was declared against Great Britain.

Meanwhile Denise slowly crept back to health. But a sensitive and gentle-natured girl could not go through the wild experiences of the Abbaye and of the September massacres without being profoundly affected. In her slender figure was a courage so fine and high that the mere terrors through which she had passed left her nerves unshaken; but the scenes through which she had been hurried wrought in her a strange transfiguration. The very colour of her life seemed to be changed.

This French girl loved France with an unguessed depth of proud affection, and she was scorched with shame that France—her France—should offer herself to the gaze of the world as a drunken and ragged Mænad. She forgot the dark centuries behind the Revolution which explained it, and she could not see the new life which was to emerge from it. Which of

the wisest heads in Europe, indeed, remembered the one or could foresee the other? The goal which, by such a bloody path, France was to reach was for those who stood in the smoke and dust of the Revolution beyond their vision.

Poor Denise saw Paris, the Paris of the massacres, through the tender and innocent eyes of a girl, and she was as one scorched with shame. It was as though a stately and gallant ship had fallen into the hands of a band of pirates.

"*They* are not France," she would say to Mrs. Lawrence, "the men who are doing such dreadful things."

"My dear," that good lady replied, consolingly, "they are not *you*, and that's very much more important."

But this was small comfort to Denise, and each day brought some new tidings from Paris which made the fire of shame in the poor girl's blood only more scorching. She seemed to feel each stroke of the guillotine as though it cut her own flesh.

"A French girl," she told her aunt, "had no business to be in the shelter of a happy English home while so many girls in France were passing through such scenes."

In Mrs. Lawrence's drawing-room one night a little group sat discussing Denise. Robert Lawrence, a hard-headed lawyer, could not understand her mood.

"It is morbid," he said bluntly; "her brain has been shaken by the scenes she passed through."

"Her brain," Mrs. Lawrence protested indignantly, "is as sound as yours or mine, and a great deal quicker," and the indignation in Mrs. Lawrence's voice made the group by the fireside laugh.

"There is a touch of Joan of Arc in that slender little body," said Fox, who was one of the party, "as there is in many Frenchwomen if you can only get down to it. Look how the fine ladies are going to the guillotine. Talk of the courage of soldiers in the battlefield! This is a finer thing."

Meanwhile, to Mrs. Robert Lawrence's outspoken indignation—who felt it to be a reproach to her housekeeping—the face of Denise grew thinner day after day. There were shadows under the shining eyes, lines on the girlish brow. She was restless, she longed to go back to Paris. She almost persuaded herself it was her duty to go back. If she could not help others at least she could suffer with them.

To Jack, all these complex emotions gave a new and deeper charm to the face of Denise. There was a gravity on her brow, a fire and depth in her eyes, a strength in her tender lips, which made her seem to him as if she belonged to some finer and more spiritual order than himself. Denise and he were living on terms of closest comradeship. They were drifting, indeed, into still happier relationships, and Jack's life was being suffused with a new and strange charm.

It had been explained to Denise that in a small way she was an heiress, and was not living on charity.

"Both wills," Jack said to his uncle, "have been practically abandoned; but father certainly meant five thousand pounds to go to Denise. She will not take it as a charity, and the facts need not be explained to her too closely."

So Robert Lawrence told briefly that her stepfather's will included a legacy to her of five thousand

pounds. "I will invest it for you, and then you will be independent; and as you are a proud little thing this will suit you."

Denise took it all without question, and with a wistful gratitude that was very touching.

"Father"—she always referred to the dead man as "father"—"was the best of men;" and some wordless grief filled her eyes with tears. In the mystery of the elder Lawrence's wedded life lay, Denise knew, some dark secret that she could not guess, and the sense of it perplexed and distressed her.

Her aunt regarded the so-called "legacy" with some doubts. It gave Denise a perilous independence. "She will give it all," she said, with an impatient sniff, "as she would give herself, to France."

Meanwhile, Jack's love-making did not prosper. "Did he, indeed, love Denise?" he sometimes asked himself; but the self-proposed question was only asked for the sake of the overpowering wave of tenderness with which the challenge was instantly answered. But did Denise love him? On that subject Jack swung incessantly betwixt the opposite poles of hope and fear. She would look at him as he urged his love, and a softness crept into her deep eyes, a faint colour stole into her pale cheeks, which filled her lover's mind with unreasoning gladness. Denise, as a matter of fact, did not deny—if she did not confess—her love; but she would say, with a soft resolution which filled Jack with despair, "I have no right to be happy. No French girl ought to be happy while these things are happening."

Jack argued, with masculine logic, that to make an English lover unhappy for the wrong-doing of a

number of people in France was only to increase unnecessarily the sum-total of human suffering. Denise would smile at her lover's energy, and perhaps put her slender, quivering hand in his with a gesture of shy tenderness. Then she would shake her head, and the purpose on her brow was immovable.

In January came the news of the execution of the king. Oddly enough, it left Denise comparatively unaffected. "It was certain to happen," she said, "and it is the business of men to die."

But there remained the unhappy queen and her children—the girl-princess and the little dauphin. These were in the Temple, and in such hands as Denise had seen with bloody pikes in the Abbaye; and the thought almost broke her heart. She was wroth with her own sex, which forbade her to do anything. She looked at Jack with eyes that seemed, he thought, to challenge him. Could nothing be done?

Jack was, as he frankly admitted to himself, not too willing to plunge once more into the hell-broth of Paris at that precise moment; but at the lightest whisper of Denise he was ready to start.

CHAPTER XIX

IN PARIS ONCE MORE

A BITTER February gale was blowing over the housetops of London as Lord Granville sat in his room at the Foreign Office discussing Paris affairs with his permanent secretary; and the conversation, little as Jack could have guessed it, brought matters to a crisis as far as he was concerned. England had been profoundly affected by the execution of Louis XVI. It was perhaps even more deeply stirred by the perils which hung round the unhappy queen and her children. They were held as prisoners in the Temple. What was their probable fate? The English agents in Paris were timid or stupid, and the Foreign Office was badly served.

"Can't you send a clever and trustworthy agent to Paris to see what can be done?" Lord Granville asked.

"We have no one whom we can send on such an errand. It is too risky. And if we found some one to take the risk of going, we could not trust him."

At that moment Pitt entered the room, and the suggestion was laid before him. He had a genius for choosing fit instruments, and he never forgot a face.

"Send that young fellow—what is his name?—Lawrence, who was in the September massacres. He can be trusted."

An hour later Jack was called into the room of the permanent secretary and his commission given to him. It was great promotion! And to be sent on the suggestion of Pitt himself upon an errand so gallant kindled Jack's imagination. There was risk no doubt, for the shadow of the guillotine lay black on Paris; but who would stop to weigh risks in such a task?

Denise's face went suddenly white when the news came. She was not sure she loved Jack—at all events as he wanted her to love him; but the mere thought that she might lose him darkened her life. She wanted to tell him this; but speech, somehow, seemed frozen on her lips, and she bade him an almost wordless good-bye. Jack's heart was curiously heavy as he started, by ways known to the secret agents of England, for Paris.

When he reached Paris he sought out his old quarters. It was an old mansion of medieval days, once the haunt of fine gentlemen and grand dames, but now left stranded by the ebb of the social tide. The huge, dilapidated house was a sort of human warren. The fat concierge cultivated a useful ignorance of the comings and goings of his clients. If the lodger paid his rent with due punctuality on the first day of each week he was treated as non-existent for the other six days; and each tenant of the mansion had sufficient reason for shunning observation on his own account to prevent him taking notice of anybody else.

Jack still kept the red card of citizenship given him by Toulan; for this, in the Paris of that day, meant

safety. He was liable to be challenged at a hundred points, and the possession of that card, as a rule, allayed all suspicion.

Having secured safe quarters, Jack—or Jean, as he once more became—set himself to pick up the thread of personalities and events in Paris. Dressed in blouse and red cap and sabots, he loitered in the streets and cafes, listened to the orators of the Convention, squeezed his way into the crowd at the Hôtel de Ville, and watched the noisy debates of the Commune there. He was anxious to get in touch with the Rat, for he had an instinctive sense that of all his Paris acquaintances he was the one to be most trusted; and he watched day after day at the gate of the Abbaye in the hope of seeing him.

The grim gates, to his imagination, wore an aspect of gloom. The shadow of the September massacres lay on them. In the gathering twilight the huge black mass, with no gleam of light visible in it, no cheerful sound of voices rising from it, seemed as if it were brooding over the dark crimes it had witnessed. But Jean watched for the pointed chin, the shambling and furtive gait of his old comrade in vain. Some eddy in the fierce current of events had swept him away.

Toulan was easily discoverable. His energy and daring had made him a prominent figure in the Commune, and Jean saw him, with quick step and tri-coloured sash round his waist, strutting into the wide doorway of the Hôtel de Ville with an absurd air of authority. The Commune at that moment divided supreme power with the Convention; it had the office of a whip to quicken its speed. By a daring stroke it had made itself the custodian of the royal

family. Louis XVI. was dead, and the Convention had directed the surviving members of the royal family to be imprisoned in the Luxembourg. The Commune declared that building to be insecure, and settled the business by seizing the queen and her children and carrying them off to the Temple—a gloomy medieval tower that lifted its black rectangular mass high above the northern roofs of the city. There the little cluster of despairing captives was kept under sleepless guard.

Jean studied keenly the prison of the unhappy queen and her children; he watched for hours the constant coming and going of guards and of commissioners with gaudy sashes. The building was strongly garrisoned, and was plainly watched with great vigilance. Round the whole area occupied by the tower and its outbuildings ran a slender film of tri-coloured ribbon. A child's finger could have broken it; but it was a symbol of the authority of the Republic, which shut like a steel girdle round the dark tower with its little group of unhappy prisoners.

Jean doubted long whether it would be prudent to approach Toulan; whether, indeed, it was fair to the impulsive Southerner himself to attempt to set up relations with him. He was now an influential and trusted member of the Commune. This gave him a position in which he, no doubt, could render great services to the secret agent of the British Foreign Office; but it was a question whether with him friendship would outweigh public duty. England and France were at war, and the quick-witted Southerner would be sure to suspect Jean of being in Paris on some errand which a good citizen ought to denounce.

While Jean hesitated, events settled the question

that perplexed him. He walked away from the Hôtel de Ville one evening, and was finding his way through the narrow streets which led to his own lodgings, when a strong hand clapped him on the shoulder. He swung quickly round, for there was something official in the touch. It might mean arrest. He was confronted by the flattened nose, the black eyebrows, the audacious eyes of Toulan. His countenance was as friendly as ever; he embraced the hesitating Englishman with effusion, and broke into a torrent of questions.

Where was the little one? Was she well and happy? "Ah, she was clever," he exclaimed, "to bring in Pitt;" and he laughed noisily at the recollection of the scene that terrible night in the Abbaye.

"You served us well in that hour of terror."

"Ah, they were mad," cried Toulan. "The fools! They went too far. And it injured the Republic. It made the world think us a gang of assassins." And the Frenchman frowned darkly at the memory.

They chatted long together; and, after they had parted, Jean reflected with wonder on the circumstance that Toulan had accepted his presence in Paris without question and as being quite natural. He showed little curiosity as to his business, and no suspicion. Nay, there was a curious gladness in his welcome of Jean which puzzled him.

Jean fell into his old familiar relations with the ex-shopkeeper of the Feuillants. They met frequently, and Toulan had no reserves. He was one of the commissioners on duty at the Temple, and when Jean talked with him about the royal prisoners he found him surprisingly communicative. He discussed the other

members of the Commune, the incidents of daily life in the Temple, and the drift of politics in the Convention with an almost perplexing frankness.

Jean pushed his inquiries into such matters at first with much caution; but caution with the open-hearted Southerner, he quickly found, was unnecessary. The two fell into what the young Englishman, with a touch of amusement, felt was a comradeship that had in it something fraternal.

CHAPTER XX

M. DUCLOS AGAIN

In the mean time events were occurring in London destined to exert a very disquieting influence on Jack's love-affairs.

Denise had fallen into the habit of long and lonely walks, signs of the distressed mood of feeling in which she lived. She was returning home alone one stormy February evening. The sky was full of black and hurrying clouds, the ill-made pavements were muddy, the air was dark with wind-driven fog. Through a rent in the fog her quick eye caught a glimpse of the figure of a man that seemed oddly familiar, and somehow stirred vague, disquieting memories. The same figure reappeared persistently. Some one, it was clear, was following her. A link, in old-fashioned style, flamed beside the door of her uncle's house, and in its flickering light Denise turned and recognised the dark features of M. Duclos.

"I must talk with you," he said hurriedly and in suppressed tones. "I have come all the way from Paris to see you."

"Come in, then," said Denise, pointing to the door of the house.

He shook his head.

"They are no friends to me in that house. London itself would be perilous if I were known. You must meet me to-morrow at that address," and he pressed a folded paper into her hand.

Denise hesitated. She plainly was not anxious to renew her acquaintance with her mother's quóndam major-domo.

"You need not fear," said M. Duclos with a bitter smile. "This is not Paris."

"I am not afraid," Denise answered proudly.

"Come," he said, dropping his voice, "if you value your mother's memory," and without a word of farewell M. Duclos disappeared in the fog and gloom.

In Denise's ears that plea—her mother's memory—was irresistible, and she resolved to go.

It was a street off Trafalgar Square, a neighbourhood even at that time the haunt of foreigners. Denise had to climb one flight of stairs after another till she reached the little room occupied by M. Duclos. Her feelings of distrust deepened as she looked afresh at the saturnine face, the chilly and evasive eyes of that gentleman. He apologised in half-ashamed fashion for his lodgings.

"Paris is dangerous just now, so for a time I have left it. The guillotine goes too quickly," he added with a shiver, "and it is beginning to cut off the wrong heads."

Denise understood. He had been caught by some fierce eddy in the current of events. His enemies were in power, and he had fled to save his life. Denise offered no comment on this, but asked briefly, "What have you to tell me about my mother?"

M. Duclos hesitated before he replied. He looked at Denise's face. This was no longer the sensitive child of bygone years; she was a woman, with a woman's wit and more than a woman's courage, and the steady eyes were not too friendly.

"You must have known," he said at last, "that there was some tie betwixt your mother and myself. Have you never wondered what it might be? She was my sister, and I am your closest living kinsman."

Denise was not unprepared for some such revelation. That some unacknowledged tie existed betwixt the two she was sure. But yet, as she looked afresh at the dark face of M. Duclos, and his restless, shifting eyes, she doubted.

"I have only your word for that," she said; "and, sister or no sister, you abandoned my mother when she was in peril, even if you did not betray her." And Denise's eyes kindled with anger as she remembered.

"Never!" cried M. Duclos with energy. "She would not be advised. She took her own way, and I had to take mine. It was every one for himself," he added sullenly.

"Let that pass, then. What is the story about my mother you have to tell?"

M. Duclos hesitated afresh as his eyes dwelt on Denise's face. She had subtly and strangely changed.

"I intend," he said slowly at last, "to tell the story my own way and in my own time. But," he went on fiercely, "I want money. I can play a great part in Paris still if I have it. These English are rich, and you can get money from them. You are entitled to five thousand pounds, at least, from them. It was in both wills, and they could not refuse to pay it."

"In both wills?"

"Yes, both in the will that was signed and in the unsigned will. They are robbing you if you have not got that money."

"Was only one will signed?" asked Denise, who felt that she was groping her way through some mist thick with falsehood.

"Yes, and it gave your mother everything. That young cub was left with only one hundred pounds a year." And M. Duclos grinned with disappointed malice. "They must give you five thousand pounds," he went on, "if only as conscience-money."

Denise looked at him with steady gaze.

"On what grounds was the will disputed?" she asked suddenly.

"They pretended that the signature," said M. Duclos reluctantly, "was got by a trick."

"But if the will was good why did you not take it into the courts?"

"Well," he replied sullenly, "what chance of justice had a Frenchman in an English law-court?"

"Oh!" cried Denise, "Robert Lawrence is the most honest man in the world; and if he rejected the will there *was* a trick in it, M. Duclos. And was his son to have only one hundred pounds a year? Then it was a trick to rob the orphan boy. It was a trick, and it must have been yours. You invented it, you were to profit by it. My poor mother was only a tool."

M. Duclos tried to check the torrent of Denise's anger, but it was in vain.

"I would give you everything if I believed you, and if it would help France. But you want it to help yourself and some dark scheme you have in hand. I

will give you nothing. Nay, it is not mine to give. It is stolen money, it burns my very hands." And she turned away, leaving M. Duclos an image of angry and defeated craft.

Poor Denise! As she hurried, with stumbling feet and white face, down the stairs, she felt that here was a new shame, and this time it was personal. In the background of her mind already was the sense that in her mother's wedded life was some shameful secret that stained the honour and broke the heart of her husband. If that were the case, her relationship with the Lawrence family began in a tragedy. And now it was clear there was added an element of crime, or at least of attempted crime—crime of a sordid sort, with mere plunder as its object. There must have been an attempt to cheat the senses of the dying man and to rob his orphan boy. Poor Jack! And she had been beguiled into taking part of his money!

This, it seemed to the distressed girl, was the wrong repeated in a new and subtler form. That the legacy appeared in both wills conveyed to her mind no clear meaning. In any case, neither will was valid. It was Jack's money; she could not take such a sum from her lover, and after such a history. And yet she *had* taken it. She kindled with what, it must be confessed, was somewhat unreasonable anger against him.

"He ought to have known I could not take it," she said over to herself again and again. Here was a new shame, and this time it touched herself.

But Denise was a girl of clear intelligence and of rare courage. She kept her own counsel, and showed no outward signs of troubled feeling when she returned. But that night, as the family group sat reading or

working by the fireside, she said quietly, "Uncle, did you prove father's will?"

"No," he answered in surprise.

"Why was not that done?"

"Well, the will"—and he hesitated—"it was—well—irregular—and so was laid aside by consent. Jack administered to the estate as the only son."

"But could you put aside a will merely on account of some irregularity?"

"Well, my dear, the irregularity was pretty bad."

Denise was silent for a few minutes. Then she asked, "What right have I to that five thousand pounds you received and invested for me?"

"Your step-father meant you to have it, my dear. Do you think Jack would not do what his father wished?"

"What did the irregular will say about my mother?"

"Do not trouble your pretty head," said Robert Lawrence impatiently, "about a document that was no will at all."

"Wasn't it signed?" persisted Denise.

"Yes, but by mistake."

"Did the irregular will give my mother nothing?"

Robert Lawrence grew uncomfortable. "Don't bring up that ghost of a will," he repeated.

"Did it not give her everything?" Denise persisted; "and, if it did, why do you want to put it aside? Why did my mother consent to its being put aside? Oh, you good, dear uncle," she broke out, "I know everything. I understand how good you have been. That will was a fraud, a trick," she went on indignantly, "intended to cheat Jack. But," and her

voice trembled, "my mother knew nothing of it. She *could* have known nothing of it. It was the trick of M. Duclos."

Robert Lawrence doubted the complete innocency of her mother, while his wife had no doubt at all as to her entire complicity; but both respected the girl's confidence in her dead mother's goodness.

She was looking at them both with questioning eyes. "Don't you believe that?" she asked.

"My dear," exclaimed Mrs. Lawrence with alarmed readiness, "of course we believe everything you say."

"That scoundrel," said Robert Lawrence, "was capable of everything. But I won't talk about the will any more. It is unprofessional. The whole thing is dead and buried."

"But I must talk of it. The five thousand pounds is Jack's money, and it is a gift to me. You did not mean it as a charity, I know. But I cannot take it. You are good to me; oh, so good! I shall love you always, and love you the more for the very thing that pains me."

Mrs. Lawrence by this time had her arms round the girl's neck and was kissing her.

"You must let me go," cried Denise. "The money would scorch me. I must earn my own living."

"But if Jack takes back his wretched five thousand pounds that is no reason why you should leave us," said Robert Lawrence. "This is your home. What will Jack say?"

"He has no right to say anything. He has not bought me."

Mrs. Lawrence at this point astonished her husband by saying, "If your heart is set on it, my dear, you

shall go." She read with clearer insight than her husband the tumult of the girl's feelings.

"One woman," she said, when he reproached her later, "understands another."

"Denise does not understand herself," replied Robert Lawrence in vexed tones.

"That is true, but I understand her. She is sore at heart. Her self-respect is wounded."

Mrs. Lawrence was the most energetically practical of women. Work, she knew, was a tonic even for grief; a succession of fresh incidents and faces, she wisely judged, would serve as a wholesome medicine for the sore mind of Denise. So she set herself to find comfortable lodgings for her, and amongst her friends secured her half-a-dozen pupils in French, music, etc. But Robert Lawrence insisted that he should see the face of Denise at his dinner-table almost as often as ever, and he listened to her exquisite music in the lazy after-dinner hours as frequently as before. Jack Lawrence might find that Denise had moved out of his circle when he returned, but Robert Lawrence would consent to no such loss.

CHAPTER XXI

IN THE TEMPLE

"JEAN," said Toulan abruptly to him as they met one evening outside the Hôtel de Ville, "we want an attendant in the Temple, and I shall take you. You have one great qualification—you can hold your tongue."

Jean was breathless with astonishment at such a proposal. Here was a chance beyond all he had ventured to hope of seeing what lay in the stony heart of that dark tower round which, since the death of the king, such shadows gathered and in which sat a discrowned queen and her children waiting for some unknown fate. It puzzled him to guess why such an offer should be made. It might, indeed, be a trap; but it lay too clearly in the line of his own plans for him to hesitate. If there was risk he must take it.

Nine o'clock that night found Toulan and Jean waiting at the gate of the Temple. A little cluster of officials had gathered, and each was closely scrutinised as he entered. Jean was provided with a card of entry, though Toulan explained, in peremptory accents, that it was not really necessary, as he was to be used in the household work of the Temple, and

he, Toulan, answered for him. The gloomy looking officer at the gate, however, examined both Jean and his card with vigilant care.

The municipal officers—one of them was Lepitre—entered a large room on the first floor of the Temple, in which a table was spread with food. They seated themselves, and, with many rough jests, ate a hearty supper. Then a lamp was thrust into Jean's hands, and the party mounted a winding staircase till they reached the third floor. Outside the heavy door, crossed with bars of iron, stood a sentry; but the noisy group pushed past him into the room with little ceremony, Jean following.

It was an apartment some thirty feet square, occupying the whole area of the main tower, with a door in each corner—one leading from the stairs, the others opening on little rooms in the smaller towers built at each angle of the main tower itself. The floor was of uncarpeted brick, broken in many places, and showed scanty signs of having been swept. The walls were covered with paper of a hideous green tint, that hung down in many places in ragged strips. An Italian bed stood on one side of the room; a couch with high back and sides, that served as a bed, stood near it.

There were two windows on each side of the room; but the walls were not less than nine feet thick, and each window resembled a tiny thread of glass at the end of a tunnel. Under one window was a ragged sofa; over the mantelpiece was suspended a small and dirty mirror. In the centre of the room rose a squat and clumsy pillar, from which spread flat arches to sustain the floor above. Against the pillar was placed a table, a few chairs were scattered about the room.

Jean looked eagerly at the figure sitting on the couch. Yes, it was the queen, the once proud and beautiful Queen of France, the daughter of a line of kings. Jean had seen her in the great procession at the opening of the States-General, a stately figure sitting in proud silence beside the king and looking with scornful eyes on the shouting crowd. She was Marie Antoinette still, but her hair was snow-white, though she was only thirty-seven. The oval face had grown smaller; the little mouth was drawn and pinched; the once red, proud lips were colourless, though still the under lip had the familiar Hapsburg droop—the sign of her race. Her eyes were dazed, almost as if she were drugged; fear and sorrow had quenched the haughty fire beneath those beautiful brows.

Sometimes her eyes ran to and fro like those of a frightened animal; then again they grew steady, and the pupils narrowed to a pin-point as they answered the brutal stare of the officers of the Commune. It was a haggard face, stamped with all the hieroglyphics of suffering; but still the slender neck carried the proud head as erectly as ever.

The fallen queen's arms were clasped round her boy. He was a child not quite eight years old, thin, dull-faced, and stunted; his head hardly reaching up to the side of the couch by which he stood. His whole aspect was curiously stupid. But this was the heir of all the Capets! The blood of a hundred kings ran in that poor boy's veins. Since his father's death he was Louis XVII., and that fact drew deadly perils about his unconscious head. What mother's child ever knew such strange contrasts of fate as did this thin and

dwarfish figure round whom Marie Antoinette's arms closed so passionately?

A girl of fifteen—Madame Royale, as she was called, the queen's eldest living daughter—stood beside her mother. Behind her was a gentle-faced woman of thirty—the Princess Elizabeth.

The members of the Commune who were on duty that night as guardians of the royal family took their task in a spirit half-jesting and half-brutal. They represented the wilder spirits thrown up by the storm of the Revolution, and they bore themselves in the queen's room with the air of conquerors.

One of them—Morel, an elderly man, with the face of a fanatic, and dress so elaborately rough and dirty that it must have been designed to advertise his Spartan simplicity of virtue—flung himself roughly down on the sofa beside the queen. An ex-priest, Bernard, with red, inflamed eyelids, unshaven chin, and sensual lips, discharged at the top of his voice lewd jokes at his companions, snapping his pustuled eyelids incessantly during the process. Mercereau, a stonecutter, with a face as hard as the granite he once dressed, sat down in front of the fire, turning his back on the queen. Toulan, Jean noticed, was almost the loudest and roughest of the group. Lepitre alone showed some sign of respect for the silent queen, though this was done in a furtive and half-terrified fashion.

Presently, in careless fashion, the representatives of the Commune began an examination of the room. They turned the bedclothes roughly down, opened the doors into the smaller rooms, and swaggered to and fro, talking loudly.

Jean watched the scene with astonished eyes. Pity and a furious inarticulate wrath stirred in him; but he suddenly noticed that Toulan was glancing keenly at him, and he instantly discharged his face of all sign of emotion. Pity, if it became too visible, might, he knew, cost him his head. More than once he was uneasily conscious of Toulan's quick eyes watching him intently.

Jean went every day to the Temple in company with Toulan, and was given many tasks of a domestic sort. He carried wood to the queen's chamber, helped in the service of the meals in the guardroom, etc. Each time he went into the queen's room, the little companionless boy-king, the silent, pathetic group of women who always had the air of waiting and listening for some dreadful doom to be announced to them, pricked his heart with an almost intolerable pity.

One afternoon, about a week after being taken into the service of the Temple, Jean was hurrying to Toulan's residence when, crossing the head of a narrow lane, he passed a man with a keen, bold face that seemed half-familiar. The dark, commanding eyes glanced at him quickly. He felt sure presently that the man had turned and was following him. The steps grew quicker behind him, and at the narrowest and darkest part of the crooked lane Jean felt a hand touch his shoulder. He swung quickly round; a strong and soldierly face was stooping towards him, and Jean recognised it. It was a soldier, General Jarjayes, whom he had seen again and again at his stepmother's receptions. The soldier drew Jean into an angle of the wall.

"Laurente," he said, "I know you, and so do

others; and we think you can be trusted. You do not belong to this canaille," with an abrupt jerk of his hand towards the foul buildings all about them. "You go to the Temple, you see the queen and the dauphin. Your heart is not a stone, you must pity them. Will you render them a service?"

Jean had listened in silence so far; but his wordless nod was expressive, and the look in his eyes more expressive still.

Jarjayes went on, dropping his voice to a whisper, but with great eagerness, "Give this to the queen," and he produced a tiny roll of paper. "It is a message for which she is waiting."

"I cannot," said Jean; "the representatives of the Commune are always in the room."

"Yes, but you need not put it actually into her hands. On the little table at the head of the stairs stands a water-bottle. Take out the cork and slip this roll of paper in its place. Look at it," he went on as he unrolled it. "It is blank. There is writing on it, but it is in lime-juice and is invisible. There is no risk, and we will pay"——

But at the word "pay" Jean flung up his chin with a look which arrested speech on the lips of his companion.

"Oh," he said hurriedly, "you do not want pay. Your reward will be the gleam of comfort you will carry to the sad heart of the queen."

The pair talked together a little longer, and Jean at last took the tiny roll of paper. There was risk in what he was asked to do, but the pity for the queen burning in his blood made him willing to undertake the task.

For two or three days he watched for an opportunity to do what he had promised, but in vain. One evening, however, Toulan bade him, abruptly, wait on the landing at the head of the stairs, and left the door that led into the queen's room half-open. The sentinel, as it happened, was absent, for discipline was lax, and Jean stood alone on the landing. It seemed a golden opportunity. He stood opposite the gap left by the half-opened door till the queen happened to look towards him, then with a quick gesture he pointed to the bottle, into which he thrust, as a cork, the roll of paper.

Presently the commissioners came noisily trooping out of the room and clattered downstairs. The rest of the party passed into the guards' room; but Toulan beckoned Jean to follow him, and with a certain disquiet he obeyed. Toulan led the way till they came to the lowest landing-place, where they were alone, then he turned abruptly.

"Laurente," he whispered fiercely, "you are an aristocrat. You want to help the Capets. What was that you put into the neck of the bottle? You are a traitor. Madame Guillotine will kiss your soft neck;" and the keen eyes flashed with triumph as they ran over Jean's face and figure.

Jean flushed, then grew pale; but he kept silent.

"It is there still," said Toulan in exultant tones, "to accuse you." Then he dropped his voice. "Who gave it to you? Tell me. There is gold for you in it —much gold, and safety. But you must tell me. Do not risk your head." And with insistent voice, now full of menace and now of apparent kindness, Toulan pressed him over and over again to say from whom the message came.

Jean looked even more impassive than ever while the keen-faced Frenchman bent towards him; but at the repeated demand, "Tell me, who gave it to you?" he shook his head with a look of doggedness. Betray! At the mere thought scorn ran like a flame through his blood. So expressive was his glance that a slower-witted man than Toulan might have seen that the impassive face of the Englishman was only a mask for a brave and strong spirit.

A light, indeed, was slowly kindling in Jean's eyes, a look of purpose had crept into his face. The Frenchman was watching him, and with characteristic quickness read his thoughts. He was measuring his interlocutor's figure for a leap upon him.

A half-smile ran across Toulan's face. He lifted his hands with an arresting gesture, opened the door of the room behind him, and with a glance of his eye drew Jean inside. Then he softly closed the door. The two looked at each other, and Toulan's face wore for the moment an aspect of irresolution. He walked two or three times across the room. Then he turned.

"Jean," he whispered, "that poor white-haired woman, that starved little wolf-pup—who would not pity them? Yes," he said, answering the wondering inquiry in Jean's eyes, "it was a trap. Lepitre said you were to be trusted, but we could take no risks. We wanted to test you. We have a plan for getting the queen out of the Temple. We want you to be in it, and we tried this business of the roll upon you as a test."

The broken, hurried sentences by this time had become intelligible to Jean. There was a plot for the queen's release, and he had been chosen to take part in

it. The message was a trick which put him in the power of the conspirators if they found they could not trust him, but it was also a test of his loyalty.

"It is a real message," said Toulan presently, "and it will stay where you placed it. The queen has had letters before in the same fashion, and knows where to look for them."

Jean's consent to take part in the plot was wordless, but expressive; and Toulan without hesitation went on to explain their plans.

CHAPTER XXII

PLOTS

THAT night, as Jean lay on his rough bed in the darkness, he went over, with fresh wonder, the events of the day. He was suddenly caught in an eddy of the great underground stream of plots and conspiracies flowing through Paris. And the thought that he might help that sad and queenly figure in the Temple fired his blood. It was the very business which brought him to Paris. But was escape possible? Surely a more hopeless task was never attempted by the wit of man!

There were four to be delivered, three women and a stupid and helpless child. Were they birds, that they could fly? The Temple swarmed with spies and officials. The unhappy prisoners were never left alone, even at night. No one could come into the Temple without a card of entry or go out of it without the closest scrutiny. There was access to the rooms by only one flight of stairs. It passed three floors, and each was full of guards. What art would serve to bring the stumbling feet of that little flying group past all these defences and through the jealously guarded outer gate of the Temple itself?

If by some miracle they were brought out of the Temple, what remained? Paris was fermenting with hate. It was a city of informers and spies. The unhappy captives were well known. Every street through which they passed would be a whispering gallery; the very pavements would cry out against them as they fled. They were friendless. What roof would shelter them?

Yet what is impossible to human wit and courage? Lepitre was hand in glove with Toulan in the scheme. The king, as it happened, had once flattered his pride as a scholar. When in the king's room on one occasion he asked permission to take a Virgil from the shelf.

"Do you know Latin?" asked Louis with surprise.

"Yes, sire," answered Lepitre, and then, with a scholar's readiness, he quoted the lines:

> "Non ego cum Danais Trojanam exscindere gentem
> Aulide juravi!"

The king smiled, and from that moment treated Lepitre with a respect which flattered him. No doubt the opportunity of helping to deliver a queen tickled Lepitre's vanity and predisposed him to take part in the scheme which Toulan's more daring brain had framed. The imagination of the old pedagogue had taken fire at the thought of having part in a great conspiracy. He almost believed himself to be one of Plutarch's men!

Jean shook his head when Lepitre's part in the plot was explained. He knew his old teacher too well to imagine him taking a successful part in a scheme which involved tremendous risks. No gleam of courageous fire burned in those goggle eyes. But Toulan was confident.

"He is to have his price, and he is the president of the Passport Committee. He can give us the papers we need, and we cannot do without him. We talk with the queen as often as we like," he added exultantly.

Jean looked astonished.

"But the trick is simple." And Toulan went on to explain it.

When the commissioners met in the guardroom they distributed their duties by lot. Discipline was careless, and often three commissioners only made their appearance, two of whom were always Toulan and Lepitre. When this happened, Toulan wrote the word "day" on all three tickets. The third commissioner was given his choice first, and drew, of course, a card with the word "day" upon it. Toulan and Lepitre then threw their cards into the fire, as though they necessarily carried the word "night." In this way they secured the night duty to themselves almost at pleasure. So there was concert betwixt the prisoners and those who were plotting to deliver them.

Toulan was the heart and brains of the scheme. His fiery Jacobinism had been genuine enough at first. He was a Southerner, vehement and passionate—if fickle—like most Southerners, and in the early stages of the Revolution he had won fame as an orator of the pavement. He had played a daring part in the storming of the Tuileries; he was a member of the Jacobin Club and of the first Commune—one of the fiercest, indeed, of that crowd of fierce spirits. He still lived on the credit of those early exploits.

But his Jacobinism now was only a mask. What miracle had so strangely changed the man who led the

assault on the Tuileries on August 10 that he was now plotting to deliver the once-hated queen? No doubt the pathos of the silent group in the Temple—two helpless women and two children—had touched his quick, Southern nature. Disappointed ambition, too, counted for much. Others who had done less than he had risen to high posts; but he was still only a clerk in the Emigrants' Property Office for the Paris district. He was of a combative nature; and to pit his wit against the comrades of whom he had grown weary, and whom he despised, was in itself a temptation. Then, to be the deliverer of the Queen of France! Yes, Toulan was heart and soul in the great enterprise!

The four conspirators, Toulan, Jarjayes, Lepitre, and Jean, met frequently at the room of one or other of them, and in these brief conferences Jean, somehow, came to play an important part. The look of dullness was only a veil for a keen and daring spirit. His shrewd, practical sense amounted almost to genius; and he knew one section, at least, of Paris—the Paris of alleys and slums—better than even his fellow-conspirators.

The plan that grew into shape was simple and daring—not to say audacious—but seemed likely to succeed. Certain officials could enter the Temple without cards and leave it without close scrutiny. Amongst these was the lamplighter, with his two lads, who came every evening about dusk, went the round of the lamps, and left about nine or ten o'clock. The sentries were familiar with the figures of the man and his lads, and passed them both in and out as a matter of course.

To attempt to buy the lamplighter was perilous,

The very offer of a bribe would show that some disloyal design was on foot. But Toulan, a Jacobin of the Jacobins, was beyond suspicion. He could pretend that a friend—a good patriot—wanted to see the Temple and the queen, and without exciting suspicion could ask the lamplighter to give up his office for a single evening.

Public attention, as it happened, had for the moment ceased to be fixed on the Temple. The fierce duel betwixt the Girondists and the Mountain, now moving fast to a climax, turned the Convention itself into a field of battle, on the issue of which all Paris was hanging day by day. As a result, there was just then some laxity in the watch kept in the Temple; and the care of the prisoners, through the clever tactics of Lepitre and Toulan, had fallen almost exclusively into their hands.

There was much careless coming and going of commissioners at the Temple. On a given night, Toulan and Lepitre would arrange to be in sole charge of the queen's room. The queen and her sister-in-law were to be disguised as municipal officers, with long cloaks and scarves conspicuously showing. The broad-brimmed hats would hide their faces. There was no difficulty in procuring for them cards of entry, if by any evil chance they were challenged. The queen's daughter, Madame Royale, was to be disguised as one of the lamplighter's boys, and clad in a dirty pair of trousers and a carmagnole jacket. The little dauphin was to be smuggled out in a basket by Jean himself.

How could a child of eight be packed, it may be asked, into a basket? But the dauphin was little better than an attenuated dwarf. Long afterwards

there used to be pointed out on the wall of the room in the Temple a mark showing the height of the boy, with an inscription by Marie Antoinette herself: "27th March 1793: 1 m. ·026"—that is, exactly three feet two inches—less than the length of a clothes-basket.

There remained the two personal attendants on the prisoners—a sly and dangerous pair named Tison and his wife, hated and feared as spies by the queen. They were to be drugged, or if necessary seized, gagged, and thrown into the little tower-room opening from the queen's chamber.

The escaping party were to leave in pairs, with an interval betwixt each, Jean coming last, with his basket containing the prince. Once outside the gate they were to turn to the left, into the Rue de la Corderie—now the Rue de Bretagne—and Jarjayes had arranged for vehicles and relays of horses to the Normandy coast, whence a boat would take them to England.

Yes, the scheme was plausible, clever, daring. But Jean was no imaginative Frenchman. His stubborn English sense made him uneasy. There was a weak link in every chain. What was the doubtful human link in this? Not Jarjayes—he was a loyal gentleman. Not Toulan—he had nerves of steel and was whole-hearted in the plot. It was Lepitre. Jean, by a sure instinct, felt that behind the dim goggle eyes, the loose mouth, the shallow vanity of his old teacher there was neither courage enough nor loyalty enough to keep him unshaken in the tangle of perils through which the conspirators must pass, and where a gesture, a careless word, a suspicious look, must bring arrest and death.

"He will fail you," he said to Toulan with conviction; and Toulan could only answer with a fierce Southern execration.

The whole scheme stood ready to be put into effect. Each day of waiting increased the chances of failure. Of the four conspirators three were keen for action; but Lepitre doubted, hesitated, and day after day brought excuses instead of passports. Jean could hardly meet the queen's challenging eyes asking dumbly each time he entered her room, "Is this the moment?" Each member of the little group of conspirators in turn tried to harden that lump of human jelly Lepitre into consistency, but in vain. The queen gave him a lock of her hair, the Princess Elizabeth knitted a cap for him. But the owner of the head beneath that cap had no intention of ever putting it beneath the steel of the guillotine.

And while the conspiracy thus refused to execute itself, the shock of external events changed the whole situation. There was a rising in Vendée. The little sulky, stupid-looking boy was proclaimed as Louis XVII., and men were killing and being killed in his name. He suddenly became a supreme counter in the game of revolutionary politics, and a new vigilance stirred amongst his jailers. The allies were thundering on the frontiers of France. Aix-la-Chapelle had surrendered. Dumouriez had played a traitor's part and gone over to the enemy. The sullen boom of the far-off guns on the frontier seemed to shake Paris with their vibrations, and the eyes of the crowd turned with new and gloomy menace on the Temple and its little band of prisoners who, in a sense, were the hostages of the Revolution.

Lepitre came with affrighted face one afternoon to Toulan's room.

"It is useless," he said, with agitation, "she is doomed. We shall only share her fate if we go on with our plan."

He proceeded to explain that on his way to meet his fellow-conspirator that afternoon he had heard the cry, "Death to the Austrian!" raised amongst the crowds *thirteen* times. He had counted; and though —like many other revolutionaries—Lepitre had emptied his mind of all religious faith he had not cleansed it of superstition. And the number thirteen to him was fatal.

Toulan saw that to press Lepitre further would be dangerous, and he and Jarjayes began to weave plans which left their former comrade out. But their sole chance of securing the necessary passports rested with Lepitre, and his breakdown practically destroyed all hope of escape.

Such is the satire of history, however, that of this cluster of conspirators, Toulan, who was absolutely loyal, lost his head under the guillotine; and Lepitre, who destroyed all chances of success by his want of nerve, outlived the Revolution, saw the return of the Bourbons, and was made Knight of the Royal Order of the Legion of Honour as a reward for his part in a conspiracy which his cowardice had defeated!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DAUPHIN

JEAN still clung to his post in the Temple; and one night, a little later than usual, he was summoned to carry the lamp up the stairs for the officials of the Commune. There were some new figures in the group, the chief being Ducreux, who belonged to the inner circle of the Commune. He had the eyes of a fanatic; the ghastly pallor of his face, his restless, twitching eyes, filled Jean with a vague sense of disquiet. Here was a man plainly bent on some cruel errand. The ex-priest Bernard, with eyelids redder than ever, was with him. Simon, an ex-cobbler, with horrible blear lip, malformed hands, and cruel eyes, strutted with an air of unusual importance in the little group.

As the door of the queen's room opened, the two hapless women were sitting at the table mending a boy's dress. The dim light of the candle on the table fell on the sad and downward-bent faces. At the tread of so many feet the queen lifted her head. Jean saw her countenance was drawn and thin; the old look of pride had quite gone. She made a gesture towards the bed. "My child sleeps," she said gently.

"He must wake," replied Ducreux in accents of

authority. "He is being brought up as an enemy of the people, and the Republic must take charge of him." And he held out a paper in his hand.

As the astonished queen showed no signs of taking it, he began to read it. It was an order of the Committee of Public Safety directing the son of Louis Capet to be removed from his mother and placed under a good patriot as tutor.

"Here," said the ex-priest with a grin of cruel humour, "is the tutor;" and he thrust forward the ex-cobbler, who stood awkwardly twisting his malformed fingers.

The queen listened with a bewildered air, while Ducreux repeated in still louder tones his tidings.

"My son!" said the queen in a wondering voice, "my son! You cannot take him from me. He is ill. He will die if taken away."

Then her eyes ran over the evil faces that looked at her with stony indifference. She started up.

"You shall kill me before you take the child away."

Her movement was so sudden and wild that it struck silence for a moment through the group of commissioners. Presently Ducreux commenced an address to "the widow Capet" in rebuking accents; but the unheeding queen turned and snatched the wondering child, his eyes still drowsy with sleep, from the bed, and clasped him passionately to her breast. The ring of gloomy faces had no pity. Simon's bleared lips were twisted into a cruel grin.

"What!" said the queen in an undertone, as if to herself; "give my child to *you!*"

Then she looked round. Against those pitiless

wills the distracted woman felt that her passion and grief beat in vain. It was like the wings of an affrighted dove beating against a wall of granite. Ducreux presented his order again and again, at regular intervals, like a pistol, and repeated the phrase "the decree of the Committee of Public Safety," as though it were a charm. The ex-priest Bernard broke into jeers. He laughed with evil delight at the scene.

"The tutor of Louis XVII.!" he said, clapping the ex-cobbler on the shoulder. "The tutor of a prince of the blood!" and he laughed afresh, as though at an exquisite jest.

The queen's eyes ran wildly round the room. They rested for a moment on Jean's face. There might be pity there, but there was no help; and her gaze turned afresh to the harsh and evil countenances of the commissioners.

For two frantic hours this strange conflict betwixt unpitying authority and a broken-hearted woman's grief lasted. The queen at last fell on her knees, with outstretched hands and streaming eyes—the last humiliation of that proud spirit—to beg, and to beg from such a group, her child. Madame Elizabeth and the girl-princess fell beside her.

The ex-priest, beyond even the other figures in the group, seemed to enjoy the evil triumph of the spectacle. He dwelt on it with dreadful relish. The Queen of France and two "daughters of France" bowed in that sad humiliation!

"Come," at last said Ducreux abruptly, "the boy must be given up;" and he caught the child's arm. "Better have Citizen Simon for a tutor than ride in the tumbrils."

"Both your children will ride in the tumbrils," whispered the ex-priest with a grin, "if you resist. The girl would look well there;" and he turned his red eyes menacingly on the queen's daughter, who shrank back as if she were struck in the face.

Suddenly the queen grew strangely calm. She ceased to weep. Grief seemed frozen in her.

"He must go," she said to Madame Elizabeth. She began to gather up with trembling fingers the boy's little garments. She brushed his hair, kissed him passionately again and again, and tried to speak. Then with a shuddering gesture she released him. The little figure of the boy was led away, Simon's crooked fingers holding his hand, the commissioners with their tri-coloured scarves grouped about him. He gave one backward look; it was a child's look, questioning and terrified, a look of uncomprehending reproach. The queen's eyes dwelt on him with an expression of broken-hearted and wordless anguish—a figure so pathetically little and lonely set in a ring of mocking and pitiless faces. Then the mother's hands were suddenly extended to him with a gesture of despair.

As Jean closed the door he saw the unhappy queen, an image of speechless grief, turn slowly and look at the little empty bed, still warm from her child's body. So might Rachel have looked when Herod's sword had done its work.

Unhappy queen and mother! Here was grief more bitter than a lost crown or a dead husband.

Simon's quarters were on the floor above the queen's room, and every morning a group of commissioners went up to satisfy themselves that the dauphin was in

safe custody. Great armies were threatening France in his name as Louis XVII., and the Revolutionists were not unwilling to revenge themselves for the terror these gathering hosts caused by mocking the unhappy boy who carried that title.

Some of the boy's jailers, however, had not the excuse of aggrieved patriotism for their ill-will towards the child; they were moved by nothing more than the luxury of cruelty. The ex-priest Bernard was always in the group that visited the little captive, and with two or three others he usually stayed for a long time in the room. Some dreadful fascination drew Jean to the door of the room at these times, and he could hear the crying of the little fellow and the loud laughter of the commissioners. They were baiting "the little Capet," and they came from the room each morning with a look of satisfied malice on their faces which made Jean clench his fists with honest anger.

The queen at first asked many questions about the boy, but they were never answered. It was as though he had been dropped into some gulf of darkness, or as if the silence of death had shut about him.

Repeatedly when he went on some duty to the queen's room Jean found her sitting in a listening attitude which puzzled him. What sounds from the outer world was she trying to catch? He presently found the key to her strange attitude. The room in which the little prince was confined was above that of the queen. At times the sound of a heavy foot could be heard—that of Simon the boy's tutor; and the mother was listening to catch—or imagine—a lighter step following it.

The promenade at the summit of the tower was

divided in two by a close balustrade. On one side the little prince walked for exercise, on the other the queen and Madame Elizabeth, but always at different hours. One day, however, when Marie Antoinette was walking listlessly to and fro she caught the sound of feet and voices on the other side of the wooden barrier. It was the little dauphin and his tutor. The queen ran to the barrier and crouched, peering through a crevice through which she could see the group on the other side.

Yes, it was her son; her son, but how tragically changed! The black garments the little fellow had worn, signs of mourning for his dead father, were gone. His dress was ragged, his face was unwashed, he wore a cap of liberty. Simon, with a stick, walked behind him, shouting, "Sing, little Capet!" and enforcing the admonition now and again with a blow. He was trying to make the unhappy lad sing "Ça ira;" and the thin, wavering voice at last rose, a thread of tremulous sound, on the air. Then it broke in sobs.

"Sing, thou wolf-cub!" cried Simon with a blow.

Madame Elizabeth ran and stooped over the queen. The blood was trickling down the fence from her hand. She had pressed it into the splintered wood in her anguish till the flesh was pierced and the red, warm blood ran like water.

"You are hurt!" cried Madame Elizabeth.

"Nothing can hurt me now," said the broken-hearted queen.

Two months afterwards, when taken to the Conciergerie, in passing the low door that led to her cell, she struck her too proudly erect head against the lintel, and was asked if she were hurt. She gave the same answer, "Nothing can hurt me now." And it

seemed as if, with that vision of her unhappy child, the capacity for suffering in her had exhausted itself. Pain has its merciful limits; and when the unhappy queen touched this dreadful height of suffering some compassionate nepenthe seemed to steal through her brain and drug it into insensibility.

But the unhappy boy still suffered. When some of the commissioners were visiting him one afternoon a pitying curiosity drew Jean up the stairs. The door that led into the room stood half-open, and he saw what was taking place. The little prince stood, a white-faced, terrified child, with dazed eyes, in the middle of the floor. His skin was dirty, his hair uncombed, his feet were naked. His little wrists and knees were swollen.

"Dance, little Capet!" Simon was saying; and, stooping, he struck with his stick the tiny bare feet. "Dance, you cub-wolf!" he repeated with an oath; and the little feet, under the argument of the threatening stick, lifted themselves tremblingly up in turn, while the group around laughed.

"Nay," said the ex-priest, "the descendant of St. Louis must go through his devotions."

He began to recite a blasphemous travesty of the Litany, and to compel the trembling lips of the boy to repeat the dreadful words after him, while the circle around exploded with laughter. The boy seemed to Jean like a little palpitating rabbit in the clutch of dogs. But the ex-priest, with a touch of malice beyond his fellows, wanted to taint the little fellow's mind.

"Sing!" called another of the group; but the boy, with his frightened eyes, was past singing. One of the men pulled a bottle from his pocket and made the boy

drink, and drink again. Then the little white face flushed, and, following the thick voice of Simon his tutor, he began to falter out the "Marseillaise."

Jean stole away with flaming eyes, whispering execrations softly under his breath. The scene kindled him to a passion of rage.

Sometimes Simon went by himself to the room where the boy was confined, and then Jean feared for the lad more even than when all the commissionnaires joined in the sport. One day, as Simon went up to the boy's room, Jean, obeying a resistless impulse of pity and anger, followed him. He listened at the door, and could hear the gruff voice of the ex-cobbler and the whimpering of the boy.

He pushed the door back softly, slipped into the room, and closed it. The boy was crouched in a corner of the room. He had been set to clean the boots of the ex-cobbler's wife, and the helpless hands had failed in the task. The poor lad had fallen by this time, indeed, into a state of semi-idiocy. He was crouched in a corner of the room, Simon standing over him with uplifted stick in hand. He had not heard Jean enter.

Jean turned the key in the lock gently and stole across the room. But the ex-cobbler's ears were quick. He turned, and as his eyes fell on Jean his brow grew black with anger. He lifted his stick with a curse. Before he could strike, Jean leaped on him, caught the uplifted stick, and, tripping the Frenchman up, rolled him with one energetic push on to his face. Wrath was running, a wave of fire, through every drop of blood in his body. He put his foot on the cobbler's neck, grinding his face into the floor, and rained a torrent of blows on the broad expanse of his body. So

silent was the approach, so swift the leap, so fierce the hurricane of blows, that Simon lay half-strangled under Jean's foot. Presently Jean stopped and plucked his victim to his feet.

"You brute," he whispered, with white face and flaming eyes, "to torment a child! You shall feel what you have made him feel."

Simon opened his mouth as if to shout.

"Silence, or I will kill you!" and the look on Jean's face was so dark that Simon's voice died away behind his chattering teeth. Jean's eyes, on fire with anger, ran over the face and body of the ex-cobbler. His feet were bare.

"Dance!" he suddenly said; "dance, you slave!" And, stooping, he smote the sprawling feet so furiously that, with a whimper, the ex-cobbler lifted one of his stricken feet and then the other. "Dance!" urged Jean, recalling the scene he had witnessed a few days before.

Presently he stopped. The tempest of anger in him was dying out, and he felt ashamed of his own performance.

"If you torture the boy again," he said, "you shall be massacred. Nothing can save you. Do you hear? Every blow you give with the stick shall be repaid with the knife."

Jean's look was so fierce, his whisper so terrifying, that Simon's teeth began to chatter again. Jean flung him, battered and shaken, into a corner of the room.

"Lie still!" he said, standing over him for a moment with menacing gesture. Then he passed swiftly out of the room, went coolly down the stairs, reached the gate, slipped through without challenge, and disappeared in the network of dark alleys beyond.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN LONDON

JEAN had not intended to interfere when he followed the ex-cobbler to the dauphin's room, still less to interfere in a fashion so dramatic; but anger had leaped up in him full-grown at the sight he witnessed. It ran like a flame along every nerve in his body. It mastered him. It crystallised into avenging purpose as with a breath, and without the consent of his brain.

It was clear he could not return to the Temple, and whether he had helped the unhappy lad or harmed him he could not tell. Perhaps he had made his fate worse. But at least he had frightened Simon, and he had certainly thrashed him; and at that delicious recollection Jean smiled softly to himself with a tingling sense of delight.

As a matter of fact, after an experience so terrifying, Simon felt as if some invisible power watched over the little dauphin. The unhappy lad was no longer tormented, though the neglect into which he fell was almost as cruel as the more active torment of previous days. For nine months he was at the ex-cobbler's mercy—a neglected, unwashed, unpitied drudge. For six months after Simon gave up his charge the boy-prince was practically a forgotten child. He was

thrust into a room the outer door of which was built up, with only a square hole left, covered by a grating lifted two or three times a day to thrust in a little food and water. This heir of all the Bourbons, sitting muttering in the darkness for months, grew blind and semi-idiotic. His room was foul as the den of a wild beast.

Something of the ape and of the tiger survives in human nature, and the cruelty shown to the little dauphin was compounded in about an equal degree of the filthiness of the one and the cruelty of the other.

Jack felt that Paris had now grown too dangerous. He had been many weeks in the city, and had become known to too many people. His reports to London had been valuable, but with the breakdown of the plot for the queen's escape a new situation was created. This was realised by the British Foreign Office, and to his own relief he was peremptorily recalled.

"You have done well, Lawrence," said the Permanent Secretary when, after he had reached London, he reported himself to the Foreign Office. "But it is clear that nothing more can be done at present, and it would be hardly fair to ask you to risk your life without some clear purpose to be served."

Jack was welcomed as a hero with loud beating of metaphorical timbrels by his aunt; his uncle received him with a warm grasp of the hand, which was more gratifying than even his aunt's admiring exclamations. But, to Jack's astonishment, there was no Denise in Portman Square. Mrs. Robert Lawrence explained that she was now teaching French and music and painting to the children of several good families. She had a room of her own in the house of a widow lady in Duke Street, and was shaping her own life.

Jack had heard nothing of M. Duclos's reappearance, of Denise's discovery of the truth about the elder Lawrence's will, and of her resolve to earn her own bread; and when it was all explained to him he stormed furiously at the whole story.

"My future wife," he cried, "has no need to earn her own bread!"

"She is not your wife yet," replied Mrs. Lawrence; "and if you do not show some common sense and some intelligent sympathy she never will be your wife."

"Sympathy!" cried Jack with astonishment.

"Yes, sympathy. You must try to see things from her point of view. The poor girl is fighting for her own self-respect. Her mother's history makes her sensitive, and do you wonder at it? Be patient with her."

"I will be as patient as she wants me to be. Patient!" he went on with rising voice; "of course. Who would not be patient with the brave girl? But hang that five thousand pounds!"

Jack's first interview with Denise left him furious. She wanted to talk about his experiences in Paris, but he refused to discuss anything except her reasons for leaving the home circle in Portman Square; and Denise, since the subject had to be discussed, spoke with a decision that took her lover's breath away. She had, she declared, the most tender sense of the goodness of Robert Lawrence and his wife, and her eyes filled with grateful tears as she spoke of them; but she was resolutely angry with poor Jack.

"You deceived me," she said; "you shamed me by the gift of money. Was it frank not to tell me that it was a gift? You ought to have known I could never take it. I had no legal claim to it. It was charity."

"It was not charity, it was justice. The money was meant for you by my father. It is yours morally."

"Yes, but not legally. Would you have done the same with an English girl?"

"Yes, if she had been *you*."

"How," asked Denise, ignoring Jack's qualification, "could a self-respecting girl take five thousand pounds as a gift from one who"—here she hesitated, and the colour stole into her cheeks—"who pretended to love her!"

"Pretended!"

"Well, who claimed to be her lover. It was kind, but," she went on relentlessly, "it was clumsy. It was unfair. It put me in a cruel position."

Jack looked at her with wondering eyes. This was a new Denise, no longer a docile, sweet-natured maiden, with nothing but tenderness on her lips. Here was a woman with chivalry in her ideals and a very human fire in her blood. Just then, too, the fire was scorching Jack badly. There was, he admitted, no ignoble element in it. It gave Denise herself, indeed, a fresh charm. There was a new glow in her cheeks, a keener decision in the curve of her lips, a deeper gravity on her brow. This angel of gentleness, shaken with anger, strangely moved him. Never before had he felt so tingling a desire to take her into his arms. Yet her unrelenting eyes wounded him.

"I did not think," he said at last sadly, "you would have been so unfair."

"I am not unfair," she replied as she turned away; "but you have been unfair to me."

When Jack told the story of his interview to his

aunt and uncle that night he was met with only doubtful sympathy.

"She is absurd," said Robert Lawrence with masculine impatience.

"But what makes her so sensitive," contended his wife, on fire to defend Denise, "is the knowledge that there *was* some attempt at fraud with regard to your father's money. The fraud, too, was in her mother's interests, and you would have been its victim. She is, at bottom, angry on your behalf. Some of the stain of the business, too, she thinks, clings to her. Do you wonder that she is so sensitive? She wants to keep her hands clean."

"Yes, but I wonder that she can be so unjust to me," persisted Jack.

"Well," said his uncle philosophically, "justice is not a woman's strong point. She has not the legal mind. She is a first-class partisan, but a very bad judge. A woman has no neutral tints; she knows nothing of suspended judgments."

"Women," said his wife indignantly, "feel more than men, and they see things that men are too blind to see —I warned you," she went on to her nephew, "that you would have to be patient with the poor girl, and you are quarrelling with her already."

"Quarrelling!" cried Jack in astonished tones.

"Yes, quarrelling. You will have to see things from her point of view. You must win her by sympathy; and if she is worth having she is worth winning."

"She is worth all the winning in the world, but I thought I had won her. And now to lose her by what was meant to be an act of justice is hard."

Denise wept passionately after the interview with her lover, and she wept afresh on her aunt's shoulder as she told the story. Jack, on his side, had the capacity for slowly kindled but long-enduring anger characteristic of his race; and Mrs. Lawrence grew anxious as she realised into what unhappy relations the two were drifting.

CHAPTER XXV

A WHIFF OF GRAPE-SHOT

JACK LAWRENCE had risen fast in the esteem of his superiors in the Foreign Office, though his rise was due to an unusual combination of circumstances. France and England were at war, and diplomatic relations of an official sort betwixt the two nations had come to an end. But the British Foreign Office felt the want of trustworthy secret agents in Paris, and they wanted such agents all the more because changes in the forces ruling France were so swift and sudden. Some one in Paris was needed, with cool eyes, to watch the witches' dance of parties there—an agent with insight enough to detect the forces behind events and shaping them.

And this youngest clerk in the service of the Office was discovered to possess these qualities in a surprising degree. He knew Paris from its gamins to its politicians as a Cockney knows the streets within sound of Bow Bells. He had a cool head and a certain histrionic gift which enabled him to act a part charged with great risk with perfect skill and even a relish of enjoyment. And in French politics and about French politicians he had a clearness of vision that astonished wiser heads. Again and again he had been sent on

some secret errand to Paris, to get into communication with some conspicuous politician or to carry a message to some member of the Royalist party, and on each occasion he had done the work committed to him with a completeness and skill which won him praise and new tasks of the same kind.

He was in Paris late in 1795 on one of these secret errands, when, as he was crossing the Place Vendôme, his eyes fell on a figure in meditative attitude in the centre of the great square, where the statue of Louis XIV. had once stood. There was something in the attitude that seemed familiar, and as Jean—to use his Paris name—came closer he recognised it. It was his old comrade of Brienne. Jean's steps grew slower as he approached, and he studied the meditating figure with keen curiosity. Bonaparte—to use the name by which he was now known—looked ill and haggard. He was very thin; the dead gold of his complexion in younger days had changed to a bilious yellow. He was visibly older than when Jean saw him last, his dress was neglected. Fortune apparently had not smiled on him.

Bonaparte turned as Jean stopped, his eyes ran with one keen flash over his face and figure. But, swift as was the glance, Jean felt that it had all its old compelling power; it was keener and harder, indeed, than ever. Bonaparte's whole look suggested to Jean some fierce bird of prey whose field was the wind-blown air, but whom adverse fate had set walking with ungainly steps on the prosaic earth. The hawk-like eyes deepened that impression; and Jean was conscious that the feeling his old comrade's look always produced —the sense that he was being assessed, summed up,

valued as a tool, perhaps flung aside—was as irresistible as ever.

Bonaparte had instantly recognised Jean. His eyes kindled for an instant, perhaps they even softened.

"*L'Anglais*," he said, "in Paris!" Then his eyes narrowed with sudden suspicion. "What are you doing here?" he asked. The penetrating eyes dwelt for a moment with their characteristic fire and swiftness on Jean's face. "Bah!" he said, "you are harmless."

The pair fell into conversation, and it was at once clear that Bonaparte had no curiosity as to the good or ill fortune of his companion's affairs. He dismissed that subject as irrelevant, and went on in quick—not to say fierce—and broken sentences to talk of himself: what he had done at Toulon, at Genoa, at Corsica. Jean knew the main facts. Toulon had given him a moment's fame. He was something more than a good artillery officer, he had a genius for command. He had been sent as special agent to the Genoese Republic, had joined the army of Italy as general of artillery, etc.

But reputations in those fierce and crowded days were short-lived, and political alliances were dangerous. Bonaparte was known as the friend of the younger Robespierre; he had belonged, indeed, to the inner ring of the Jacobins. In the language of Salicetti, "he was their man, their plan-maker." The ninth Thermidor, which put the heads of Robespierre and his immediate circle under the knife, might well have ended the career of Bonaparte. He had been arrested, and ordered to appear before the Committee of Public Safety in Paris. If Antibes had been nearer Paris the history of Europe might have been changed by a

stroke of the guillotine. Who can imagine Europe with no Napoleon, no Marengo, no Trafalgar!

Bonaparte, however, had been released and employed again. He was offered the command against the Royalists in Vendée, but some wise instinct made him refuse. Civil war such as raged in western France bred evil memories and offered few prizes. He was here in Paris, a hanger-on upon the skirts of chance, or (more ignoble still) on the coat-tails of Barras. No wonder discontent burned in the dark eyes. The early days of the Republic, it may be added, threw up many great soldiers; Moreau, Pichegru, Kléber, and others were winning fame on every frontier. But Bonaparte was fretting his fierce spirit out in Paris. France, it seemed, had no need of him and no career to offer him.

He went on to tell Jean, in bitter accents, how cruelly on the very day previous fortune had dealt with him. He had applied to the Committee of Public Safety to be sent on a mission to the East to organise the artillery of the Turkish army. The section of the committee in charge of this business had granted his request and empowered him to start for Constantinople. And on the same day the Central Committee, on the ground that he had refused to proceed to his appointment in Vendée, struck his name from the list of general officers! He was thus appointed and dismissed —his request granted and his career apparently wrecked —at one and the same moment. Fortune was mocking him.

"But," he went on, "Paris is the stage. The Convention will need soldiers. There are great opportunities here."

The scheme for the new constitution had just been

promulgated. The Convention was a single Chamber of seven hundred and fifty members. Under the new law there were still to be seven hundred and fifty representatives, but two hundred and fifty above a certain age were to form the Council of the Ancients; the remaining members would be the Council of Five Hundred. The larger Chamber had the power of initiative; the Council of the Ancients was to serve as a check. The two Chambers would be the brain of the nation, the Directory of Five its executive. Nothing could be more scientific and symmetrical.

Bonaparte's criticism of it, however, was fierce and scornful.

"Bah!" he said. "It is pretty; but what France wants is a chief. A Republic of thirty million people—what an idea! How is such a thing possible? France wants, not phrases, talk, theories of government, but a chief covered with glory."

The Convention had decreed that the new constitution should start with itself. Of its present members two-thirds were to constitute part of the new Chambers; the electors might choose the remaining third; and Paris was furious at the proposal. A fresh rising of the sections was threatened—a new and more tragical September 2.

The talk betwixt the two eddied round this point, and Jean argued that the Convention was in real danger. Its armies were distant, there were thirty thousand National Guards in Paris who would march upon it.

"The Revolution is safe," said Bonaparte with emphasis. "The peasants have the land, and they will stand by the system which has given it to them. All they want is a head. As for the Convention, this

is not August 10. The sections have no guns, the Convention has."

"Will you turn your guns upon the people?" asked Jean with a smile. "You are, or were, a Jacobin. Have you turned against the Club?"

Bonaparte cast a swift, suspicious glance on him. It was like scrutiny by a spirit of fire.

"There must be an end of chaos. But what are you doing?" he asked, as though to escape a dangerous subject.

Jean told as much of his story as he deemed prudent; and while he talked Bonaparte looked at him meditatively, and evidently with some new thought in his mind.

"I have a career," he said at last, "and can make careers. Will you link your fortunes to mine? You are not in the least clever, my poor Jean, but perhaps for that very reason you would be useful. One could trust you."

"You think," was Jean's answer, with a cheerful laugh, "that I have not wit enough to lie. It is a useful sort of dullness, you must admit, that does not know how to deceive. If I had your views as to the stupidity of not telling a convenient untruth my value to you would be destroyed. Don't you think that the quality which makes it impossible for any one to trust its possessor is hardly cleverness?"

"Ah, you are obstinate. The English blood in you makes you heavy-witted. You will never have a career."

"I suspect the career for which a gift for lying is a necessary qualification," said Jean with great bluntness; "and you ought to suspect your own principles when

you confess that what would make me useful to you is the fact that I don't possess them. Your theories, you imagine, are going to give you power; but it would ruin you if all the people about you shared them."

"For once," said Bonaparte, "you are almost clever. Yet," he added with emphasis, "you are a fool, and will never rise." And without word of farewell he turned abruptly away.

Jean breathed more freely, for his old comrade's personality dominated him; and yet, in an inconsistent fashion, he felt sore that he could be dismissed thus as with a gesture. He felt sure that he had dropped completely out of the landscape of Bonaparte's plans.

Jean was in Paris during the stormy days that followed, and saw the fighting on the day of Vendémiaire, including the "whiff of grape-shot" which, in spite of Carlyle, did not "blow the thing we specifically call the Revolution into space." As a matter of fact, it crystallised that strange human ferment into a new and enduring form.

Meanwhile, the star of Bonaparte rose fast and high. He came to Paris in May 1795 with his career apparently ended. He had narrowly escaped the guillotine. In March 1796—only ten months later—Jean saw him start on his journey to take command of the army in Italy. He was not yet twenty-six.

"You are too young," said a member of the Directory when Bonaparte was urging his claims to this particular command.

"In a year," he replied, "I shall be old—or dead."

In a year, as a matter of fact, this astonishingly youthful General was able to say:

"The Committee of the Directory have no concern with my policy; I do what I please."

Jean stood in the Rue Honore as the new Commander-in-chief flashed past. It was a brilliant sight —the galloping horses, the thin, falcon-like face, the dark eyes under the level brows. His old comrade of Brienne was on his way to win victories greater than Cæsar ever won—and to dim fates beyond. Waterloo was only twenty years distant. And beyond Waterloo, set in the gray wastes of the Atlantic, was St. Helena!

CHAPTER XXVI

A WOMAN'S IDEALS

THE work Jack was now doing exactly suited his temperament. It was rich in the element of adventure; it carried him out of the commonplace; it needed subtlety, resource, initiative. He would have made a bad clerk, but he was of a cool and daring spirit which found in danger a tonic; and the work he was doing was certainly dangerous. His life hung in peril every moment while he was in Paris. Detection meant instant and shameful death. The missions on which he was sent needed more than a soldier's courage, for they knew no comradeship and lacked the tumult and excitement of actual battle. But it kindled all his faculties, as wine might have kindled his senses, to feel that he was pitting his wit in a deadly and constant duel with a whole city of foes.

His work brought him more than once into contact with Pitt himself, who told the Permanent Secretary that his new agent should never be sent on errands so perilous except as a volunteer. "The business," he said, "is too dangerous to be made compulsory."

"The young fellow enjoys the work," was the Secretary's answer. "He looks on it as a game of

chess, and is as cool over it as if Paris were only a chessboard and he a player."

"Yes," said Pitt, "but his head is the stake he risks."

Jack was in this way steadily drifting into what may be called the subterranean work of the Foreign Office. He discovered, however, that Denise at this point had a disconcerting lack of sympathy with him. She fell silent when he talked over this part of his work. Her brain was so quick, her response to every mood in his mind so sure and swift, that this silent breach of interest puzzled him. Here was some subtle discord of judgment betwixt them, but why he could not guess. Then he remembered that France and England were at war, and he could hardly expect a generous-hearted French girl like Denise to sympathise with enterprises intended to injure the France she loved so much.

One afternoon Jack intercepted Denise as she returned from giving a lesson, and persuaded her to stroll with him in the Green Park. It was late in autumn. The day had been hot, but the great trees threw long black shadows on the soft turf, and the pair found a cool and quiet seat under a roof of whispering leaves. Jean looked at his companion as they sat in the deep shade, and thought how the perfect oval of her face, the delicate brows, the deep, quick eyes, the pure cheeks in which the colour came and went so swiftly, made a picture to kindle the imagination of an artist, still more that of a lover.

"Denise," he said presently, "I must go to Paris again. The Office wants some new work done there, and does me the honour of thinking I am the fittest person to do it."

Denise was watching with dreamy eyes the glory of the setting sun, the piled splendour of the clouds; but as he spoke she turned and looked at him, and he saw a sudden gleam of purpose come into her eyes.

"Jack," she said with decision, "I do not like it. This is not the work for you. It is unworthy of you. What the Office asks you to do is to play the spy, and the spy's work is base. You must act a part, use lies as your weapons, and only succeed by deceiving everybody."

"Well, Denise, it is war; and I must do what a soldier would do. I must obey orders."

"But you are not a soldier. A soldier, too, fights with honest weapons; but a spy fights with tricks. Yes," she repeated, with emphasis, while her face flushed, "the work is not worthy of you."

"If I do not go they must use French agents, and they can get them readily enough."

"Yes, amongst so many millions of Frenchmen there are base spirits who would sell their native land for a few francs. But why should you do their work?"

"I cannot refuse with honour."

"You cannot accept with honour."

They had drawn a little apart, and were facing each other. Jack saw the kindled face of the girl with purpose and conviction in every line of it. It seemed to him more beautiful than ever, and yet it stung him, and his nature was stubborn.

"I should risk being called a coward," he said with a touch of anger, "if I refused to go."

"It is better to be called base than to be base," she replied with spirit.

"And do you think me base for the work of this

sort I have already done?" he asked with a still deeper note of anger.

"Oh John!" she cried, illogically enough, while her sensitive lips quivered, and her eyes grew suddenly wet with tears, "how can you ask me that?"

Jack, however, sat biting his finger-nails. Here was another gulf suddenly revealed betwixt himself and the woman he thought the fairest in the world. Must he put his duty in one scale and his love in the other? If so, whichever way the scales inclined meant disaster.

"It is my duty," he said at last; "and duty is final."

Denise hesitated. "Don't you misread your duty?" she asked softly. "If you were a soldier, and were setting out on an expedition against France—the France I love—I should think it cruel, but I could not bid you stay. But to go to Paris to crouch, to hide, to wear a disguise, to tell lies, and to act lies—this," she said, rising to her feet energetically—"*this* will soil your conscience."

Jack was strangely silent that night as he sat in his aunt's drawing-room; and that lady, whose quick eyes few things escaped, noted the smileless face, the clouded brow, the long intervals of brooding silence. Presently she startled him by asking sharply what had happened. Jack stared and hesitated, while Robert Lawrence looked at him with an amused glance; for an aggrieved lover —to the dispassionate observer—always has a somewhat absurd aspect.

"He has had a talk with Denise," he said shrewdly, "and does not want to waste speech on less interesting people."

"Don't tease him, Robert," expostulated his wife, while she clicked her knitting-needles with emphasis. "Something has gone wrong. Tell us what it is."

With an effort Jack shook off his mood of gloom. He was ashamed, indeed, that his trouble had been so quickly read.

"Well," he said, "Denise has a new quarrel with me; at least not with me, but with the work I am doing. She declares it is not honourable." And he told the story of the talk in the Park.

His hearers listened in silence. The click of his aunt's knitting-needles was more energetic than ever for a few moments after he finished.

"I think Denise is right," said that lady at last. "I never liked the work you have been doing. A spy! The part is mean! They should get dirty tools for this dirty work, and not your father's son."

Jack repeated all the arguments he had used to Denise. "A man," he concluded, "must serve his country in the way his country asks." And this particular work he could do perhaps more safely than any one else.

His aunt, however, listened to his arguments with a series of impatient sniffs. "Do not blame Denise," she said at last more gently; "at all events she is jealous for your honour."

"I can guard my own honour," Jack answered sulkily.

His uncle, meanwhile, sat puffing his cigar in silence, a silence that at last exasperated his nephew.

"What do you say, sir?" he asked.

"The work has to be done, I suppose; but, to be frank, I do not like my brother's son doing it. And

Denise is wiser for you than she knows. This kind of work won't really serve your career. It can bring you no public recognition. And you do it so well that they will keep you doing it, and so you will be doing underhand work to the end of your days. You are missing the great prizes of your profession. You have done enough of this sort of work to show your quality, and you are entitled to ask to be transferred to some other branch of Foreign Office duty. If you do not take some such step you will do the work of a mole to the end of your days, and you will get the reward of a mole."

"What is that?"

"To be buried before you are dead, to live underground, to work under conditions that soil you."

Jack Lawrence paced his bedroom that night for long hours in a very undecided mood. He was vexed at bottom that Denise had a more sensitive regard for his honour and a clearer vision of what that honour required than he had himself. She saw the flaw in his career with quicker eyes than his own. But he began presently to analyse his own feelings. Why was he so reluctant to refuse the task offered him? Was it the dread of seeming to be a coward? But that feeling itself was only a subtle form of cowardice. Yes, he would accept Denise's reading of duty, and ask his chief to exempt him from this particular task.

He felt next day that to walk in some disguise through a Paris mob was a less trying experience than to go to the room of his chief and explain his request. That gentleman, however, listened quietly.

"You have earned the right," he said at last, "to say 'No.'"

"If you tell me it is necessary to go, sir," replied Jack, his face flushing, "of course I will go."

"No, we must use our own agents on the spot, and perhaps we can make some better use of you."

He reflected a moment. "We want to send a Foreign Office agent," he said, "to Egypt. Sir Sydney Smith has tangled up things there, for a good sailor may be a bad diplomatist. You shall take the despatches we are sending to the Capitan Pasha. The transport sails at the end of this week, so you must go at short notice, and you may have to stay there some months, as sooner or later we shall be sending an expedition to the East."

CHAPTER XXVII

ON THE WAY TO EGYPT

THROUGH all these months, Jack, as may be imagined, had watched with ever deepening amazement the career of his old comrade, the "*Paille au nez*" of schoolboy games and conflicts at Brienne. Was there ever before in human history such a career; a rise so swift, so sure, and to such heights? It was not the steady and ordered rise of a star in the night heavens, but the rush of a comet through space and darkness; Milton's comet, "with fear of change perplexing monarchs."

Jack had seen with wondering eyes his old comrade driving, with horses at the gallop, from Paris to take the command of the Army of Italy. On April 12, 1796, the opening battle against the Austrians at Montenotte was fought; a month afterwards came the fight at the bridge at Lodi, where Bonaparte won the nickname of "the Little Corporal," and became visible to all France. On February 12, 1797, came the capitulation of Marshal Wurmser and the final defeat of Austria. The campaign lasted ten months, and saw the overthrow of an Empire.

In this campaign Bonaparte's battles were, perhaps, the least wonderful part of the amazing story. He

learned to talk with the accents of a Cæsar. He made war and peace, set up republics, annexed provinces, overthrew kingdoms; kindled a revolution in some historic Italian state with a whisper, or suppressed it with a gesture.

A year after the capitulation of Wurmser, Bonaparte set sail from Toulon on some great and mysterious adventure in the East. The proudest fleet that ever left a French port carried an army afloat, the men that had overrun Italy and broken the strength of Austria, the most terrible fighting force in the world. For a time Europe could not guess towards what goal that mighty expedition was sailing. Then followed the wonders of the Egyptian campaign.

A career that in a space so brief had reached a height so dazzling might well be thought to have exhausted the gifts of fortune. No one could foresee the still greater events to follow. In August, 1799, Bonaparte returned a semi-fugitive from Egypt. His fleet had been destroyed in Aboukir Bay, he had left the flower of his soldiers outside the shattered walls of Acre. But in less than three months he became the First Consul. The imperial crown was at his feet.

To step in a few weeks from a tent in Egypt to St. Cloud, this—measured by the test of the almanac—is a history without parallel. The mere dates at this part of Bonaparte's career are an incredible romance. At the end of 1795 he is an artillery officer, with an arrested career, fretting with discontent in Paris. The Italian campaign takes a single year. The adventure in Egypt takes another year. Then comes three months of obscure plotting in Paris—and the First Consulship!

The wondering interest with which Jack followed this chain of dazzling events can be guessed, and the story interpreted his old comrade to him. The pride, the majestic self-confidence, the assurance of a "destiny" which always characterised his schoolmate—when embodied in a little, spindle-shanked, unknown artillery officer—were no doubt matter for laughter; but now "*Paille au nez*" became intelligible. Bonaparte's face and character were ciphers to which these tremendous events were the key.

That fretting discontent, that assurance of a beckoning destiny—what was all this but the self-consciousness of genius? Seen through drifting battle-smoke, that falcon-like face had a quite new significance. The challenging eyes, that aroused the noisy scorn of the cadets at Brienne, Jack felt were fit to look at kings with equal gaze. Yet still he knew there was in the character of his old comrade that fatal taint of ice-cold selfishness, that fundamental want of steady moral principle that sooner or later must bring disaster.

Bonaparte, however, was still in Egypt fighting Arabs, storming ancient cities, and dreaming wild, unconfessed dreams of conquest—dreams that would have shaken half the thrones of Europe with alarm had they been known—when Jack Lawrence sailed in the *Sylph* for Egypt.

Ill-fate assigned to him perhaps the most crazy ship at that moment in the employ of the British Admiralty. The absurdly named *Sylph* was a transport ill-found, unseaworthy, foul with barnacles without and fouler still with rats and vermin within. She sailed from the Downs in February, the month of wild winds, and was whipped with storms across the Bay

of Biscay, past the coast of Spain, and through the whole length of the Mediterranean.

Jack, fortunately, had steady nerves and a sea-going stomach, or the experience might well have killed him. For three days the leaky transport hovered off Malta trying in vain to make that port, a tremendous sea breaking over her all the time. The attempt to reach Malta was abandoned, and the *Sylph*, with torn canvas and shattered bulwarks, went wallowing through the wild seas eastward. The captain was a rugged old salt, in whom a sort of sea-instinct or such unconscious and inherited faculty as a sea-bird possesses took the place of any scientific knowledge of navigation; and against the buffetting of sea and wind he armed himself with perpetual doses of rum till his whole body seemed drink-sodden.

The only consolation Jack had was the company of the second mate, named Grant, a seaman of the finest type, with a courage whose serenity no danger shook and a smiling philosophy whose cheerfulness no hardship quenched. The sight of his wind-beaten but cheerful face, the sound of his unfailing laughter, was a perpetual tonic. Some inner and exhaustless fountain of mirth made him, on the deck of that storm-whipped ship, a bit of embodied sunshine.

Jack asked him one day as they stood under the break of the poop, while the green waves broke in a cataract of foam over the labouring ship's battered nose, what was their exact situation.

"The old man," said Grant with a laugh, as though it were an exquisite jest, "doesn't know. The only observation he has taken for the last week is through the bottom of a rum-bottle. Never mind, sir," he

added, as Jack's face grew grave at his words, "it is all a sea-experience. We shall come through all right."

But the next morning land was seen dimly through the drifting gusts of rain on the starboard bow. The captain pronounced it to be Rhodes. Towards evening land was discovered on the other bow too, and the astonished captain frankly declared he did not know where he was. Rhodes was on one side of their ship or the other, but on which, he declared with an oath, nobody could tell. Grant was still able to see the humorous side of the situation.

"The old man," he told Lawrence, "can often see two bottles of rum when only one is on the table, and cannot make up his mind which to take; and now he is not sure whether he really sees two capes when only one exists. But the capes are there right enough," added Grant, with a new laugh, "and we must claw past them both as best we can."

All that wild night the ship lay to, labouring heavily. The next day at noon Grant took an observation, and was able to persuade the old man that they were at the entrance of the Gulf of Satalieh, and that to run on was to be lost. The leaky old transport, by some miracle of good luck, rounded the cape to starboard, and went ploughing its slow course eastward towards the coast of Syria, where it was to join Sydney Smith's squadron outside Acre.

On the fifth night after passing Rhodes Jack had turned in, weary of balancing himself on the wave-swept deck or of trying to read in the reeling cabin. Towards morning he was awakened by a tremendous shock, a crash that seemed to shake the old transport

in every timber. Then came the tramp of hurrying feet overhead, the wild cries of the seamen, the roar of breaking seas. Jack had lain down half-dressed. He was hurriedly slipping on his coat when he heard the sound of running feet outside his cabin. The door of his bunk opened, and Grant put in his face with cheerfulness still visible in every line of his sea-wet visage.

"The old man has run us ashore, and the ship may break up any minute. Come on deck." And with a pleasant nod as though he had just communicated some ordinary bit of intelligence, Grant vanished.

Jack strapped his despatches round his waist and hurried on deck. It was the darkest hour before daybreak; the sea was like ink under the black skies. But as he looked aft he could see, high in the air above the stern, a faint, uncertain, but swiftly travelling edge of grayish white. It was the crest of a great wave riding in on the ship. It broke and swept past him, as he clung to a ringbolt, a tumult of sound and foam. He heard the crash of broken spars and torn bulwarks as the rushing hill of water tore its way along the whole length of the ship; and above other sounds could be heard one still more dreadful—the cry of drowning men swept away in the gloom.

Fortunately the break of the poop still sheltered the spot where Jack stood, or a dozen times through the hour that followed he would have been carried away by the furious seas. Presently, through the darkness he saw a figure struggling up the slanting deck to where he stood. It was Grant.

"The old man has gone with most of the crew, and unless the sea quietens the *Sylph* will soon be churned into chips."

Their faces were close together, and Jack caught a gleam of the mate's white teeth. The reckless sailor could smile when telling tidings such as these as if he discerned a flavour of humour in them, and Jack felt the gloom and horror of the scene grow a little lighter from the contagion of Grant's courage.

"Can nothing be done?" he asked in a momentary quiet of the rushing waters.

"Nothing, except to hold on. The *Sylph* is an old tub, but she has something of the solidity of a tub, and may hold together till the sea goes down. God is merciful," he added cheerfully, "and that is our hope."

"Yes, Grant, this is the time to remember the mercy of God. But we oughtn't to wait till a time like this to remember it."

"And do you think," asked Grant in wondering tones, "that a good seaman ever forgets the mercy of God? Living on God's sea, how can a man forget its Maker?"

And Jack felt rebuked by the note of astonishment in his voice.

Morning at last came, as it will come after the longest and darkest night; and with the breaking day the sea commenced to go down. Presently the two bedraggled figures, stiff and sore with the buffeting of the last three hours, were able to creep from their shelter under the break of the poop and look about them. The ship was fast; her masts had gone by the board, her bulwarks were a fringe of splinters, her bows were stove in. Evidently they were the only survivors. The black skies, the hurrying clouds, the empty, desolate horizon, the measureless stretch of leaping waves, the dim contour of the land (low and gray and

half-obscured with drifting scud), all this made a scene enough to chill even a brave man's courage.

The shore was visible at a distance of about a quarter of a mile. The sandy beach was a tumult of racing foam, the low cliffs beyond were treeless and showed no sign of human habitation. Grant had climbed up the sloping deck and was looking keenly to windward.

"No sail is in sight," he said, "and no sail could help us while this sea lasts. But the clouds are lifting, and before noon we shall see the sun. But the old craft shows signs of breaking in two amidships, and we may yet have to take our chance of riding ashore on a spar;" and he smiled cheerfully at the prospect, as though it were an ordinary, and on the whole not an unamusing, incident in a sailor's experience.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE WRECK

THE groaning timbers of the ship were an expressive proof of the truth of Grant's forecast. The ship's head was working itself deep in the sand, while the fierce seas strained the hull till every plank in it stretched and creaked. An hour later, with a harsh sound of rending timbers, the afterpart, on which Jack and Grant stood, rolled to leeward and then settled down. The shock well-nigh threw the two men into the sea. The next wave broke through the torn side of the unfortunate ship, and a sound as of thunder swept through the deck under their feet, while a white geyser of spray shot up through the companion-way.

"The poor old *Sylph* has broken her back," said Grant ruefully, "and we must go." He had been watching the wild sea and the shaking hull with steady eyes. "If we wait till the hull breaks up," he said, "we shall be caught and crushed in the timbers."

His alert brain had a plan all ready. A long spar —a spare foretopsail-yard—had been lashed under the lee of the bulwark; and though the bulwark itself had gone the spar still remained lashed to the stanchions.

"Come," said Grant, "we must get afloat on this, and the waves will take us ashore. It is a queer horse

to ride," he added with a cheerful grin, "but it will carry us ashore."

With nimble fingers, while Jack helped him, he cast loose the lashings, fixed a long bight of rope in the eyelet-hole in the band of iron that ran round the spar, and then explained his plan.

"We'll launch it overboard with the next big wave, and hang on to it."

He spoke in a tone which seemed to imply this was an ordinary and daily operation. So alert and cool was his air that a sense of the humour of it touched Jack even in that wild scene.

"You seem to be quite at home in a wreck," he said.

"Well, I have gone ashore three times and been burnt out once, and I have discovered that it takes a good deal to drown a man who doesn't mean to be drowned."

While he spoke Grant was watching keenly the run of the waves. One at that moment took shape to windward that seemed likely to serve his purpose. With quick decision he cast the last rope loose, swung the spar round, holding on to it as it shot down the slanting deck into the sea by the long bight that ran through the eyelet-hole.

Without a moment's hesitation the cool seaman leaped into the hell of waters. "Come on," he shouted as he sprang. Jack followed with a leap as daring, and the next moment the breaking waves swept in thunder over him. When he emerged from its strangling depths he found Grant, with his arm over the spar and his face as cheerful as ever, looking round to discover him, the white teeth shining through his smiling lips.

A few strokes took Jack to the spar. It was clear at once that the waves were sweeping them steadily towards the land. If they had clung to the spar itself, as it rolled, it would have crushed or drowned them, but the long bight of rope was their safety. They could push themselves free from the spar when its roll was dangerous, and then draw themselves to it again when the wave had swept past. As they drifted near the shore the sea grew more difficult, and the waves broke confusedly. There were no rocks, but the seas ran up the slope of sand with furious speed, and swept back in tremendous reflux; and where the rush and the reflux met were a thousand whirling eddies.

It was for long minutes a desperate fight for life. At the moment when Jack's strength had almost failed a bigger wave than usual came up in thunder and foam. It swept over him, and he felt himself helpless as a wisp of seaweed in the hurrying waters. He was flung on the spar. The bone of his arm snapped. Then he found himself lying half-strangled on the wet sand, while the wave retreated in thunder behind him.

He struggled to his feet. Grant was standing knee-deep in the backward-swinging wave, squeezing the water out of his dripping hair. He smiled cheerfully at his comrade.

"Thank God," he cried, "*that* is over!"

But Jack was past the smiling-point. He staggered when he tried to stand, his left arm hung like a broken stick, he breathed with difficulty. With a look of concern, Grant hurried to his side and helped him up the slope. They stood—a melancholy looking pair, ragged, wet, bruised—on a strange shore, without food or weapons; but Grant's spirit was unquenched.

"Thank God," he repeated cheerfully, "we've come through *that!*" and he flung his hand with a gesture of triumph towards the sea, as if towards a beaten foe.

Then he turned to his comrade, and examined his arm. He handled it with a skill and tenderness which astonished Jack.

"A sailor has queer jobs at times, and I have mended everything from a broken topmast to a broken leg. It seems a clean snap, and I think I can put the ends together."

He made Jack sit on a tuft of grass under the lee of a sand hummock, searched along the beach till he found some fragments of a broken box thrown up by the waves, produced that unfailing companion of a sailor, a stout knife, and whittled the board into a pair of decent splints. He tore the lining of his coat into strips, with an adroit and sudden pull put the ends of the broken bone together, and then bound the splints cleverly into place. Another strip of his coat bound the arm to Jack's breast so that it could not swing loose.

"Grant," he said in grateful tones, "you did that cleverly; but," he added with a rueful laugh, "you did it as though you enjoyed it."

For once Grant's face fell. "Did you really think that? I am sorry enough for your broken bone, but I *am* glad I could help to mend it."

And Jack forgave him his untimely cheerfulness.

The two men looked round and commenced to talk of their plans.

"You must sit here," said Grant with decision. "I will go aloft," pointing to the cliffs, "and see what sort of a landfall we have made."

Jack watched his alert and vigorous figure as he climbed with a seaman's nimbleness the face of the cliff. What exhaustless resource and hardihood the man possessed! He was a true type of the seaman of his day, as familiar with storms as a sea-bird, and as fearless of them; as much at home on the sea as if he had been web-footed; of exhaustless resource, with a courage that no perils could daunt, and a patience that no hardships could destroy. And from what inner spiritual fountain did he draw that gay cheerfulness? Jack thanked God for such a comrade.

Meanwhile Grant stood on the edge of the cliff, shading his eyes with his hand and searching the whole landscape. Presently, with a shake of his head, he turned round; but even as he turned something caught his eye. He looked long and steadily, then came leaping down the cliff.

"It is a bad anchorage," he explained; "all sand and emptiness, not a tree or house-roof in sight. But there is a queer craft showing—a camel with an Arab on his hump. He caught a sight of me, I suspect, and he will show his dirty face over the cliff presently."

Nothing could be done but to wait events, and the two men stood watching the edge of the cliff. Suddenly the curved nose, the arrested legs, the swinging neck of a camel showed above the cliff. Its rider was a Bedouin. His straight black hair was bound with a dirty rag, his face was lean and dark, the wind blew back his rags as he leaned over the edge of the cliff. He looked first at the wreck, then his keen eyes searched the sands. They fell upon the figures of Jack and Grant. He stared at them long and fiercely,

plainly taking in their whole story. Then he flung up his hand, wheeled his camel, and vanished.

"He is gone to fetch his family," said Grant; "and queer visitors they will be."

"We have nothing to fear. They may make us prisoners and demand ransom for us; but our lives ought to be safe, and we shall get what we want—food and shelter."

Grant looked at his companion. He was faint with the buffeting of the waves and the pain of his broken arm.

"There is no reckoning what those beggars will do; but any port in a storm." And he began whistling, as he kicked up the sand with his feet. Waiting, it was clear, was more trying to the resolute seaman than action.

"Where do you think we are?" asked Jack.

"The old man thought he was somewhere off Acre, but by my reckoning we are one hundred and fifty miles farther south."

"That is bad navigation," said Jack grimly.

"Well, when you take your observations through the bottom of a rum-bottle you may easily be a good many degrees out."

Just then some movement on the top of the cliff drew their eyes.

"Here comes the menagerie," said Grant.

An irregular frieze of fierce, dark faces, bearded and scowling, was looking down on them from the edge of the cliff. The figures were ragged and wild, and plainly carried guns. The lean countenances were pitiless.

"These scarecrows," was Grant's comment, "must

have looted a dozen old-clothes shops for their wardrobes."

The heads came and went above the edge of the cliff in agitated fashion, but their owners did not seem inclined to descend. A wild figure, his rags streaming out level in the wind, came for a moment to the edge of the cliff—his thin legs looking like sticks—and screamed out some message; but the gale blew away the syllables as he uttered them.

"It is no use hailing us from the topmast, old fellow, in that fashion," said Grant. "If they won't come down we must go up." He turned and looked at his comrade. "You can't come; but I know something of their lingo, and I will go." And he started to his feet.

"Do not go, Grant; let us wait till they come," urged Jack.

"We must get it over, and you must get food and shelter. I am not ugly enough to frighten them." And, with a cheerful laugh, he set out briskly towards the cliff. Almost at his first step upward the line of lean, dark faces suddenly vanished behind the rocky crest, and Grant laughed afresh as he noted it. "That is the disappearing trick," he cried.

"I can see the muzzles of muskets," said Jack in a warning voice; but with a careless wave of his hand the hardy seaman pressed on. He looked back once, and Jack could see the smile on his face.

Just then from the rock above flashed a point of red flame, a puff of blue smoke was visible and went whirling to leeward. It was a musket-shot. Grant stopped suddenly, threw up his arms, made a few uncertain, staggering steps, and fell on his face. Jack

started to his feet and ran stumblingly forward to the fallen man. When he reached him the blood was running fast from his mouth, and life was visibly running out with that red stream.

"Oh Grant!" he cried in deepest distress, as he tried with his one uninjured arm to lift the poor fellow's head. The dying man looked up. Jack had torn open his shirt. The shot which had pierced Grant's breast was plainly jagged and of heavy calibre. Jack could do nothing. He wiped the blood that ran red and hot from his dying comrade's lips. As he did so, Grant opened his eyes. The fire of courage in them was unquenched. An odd smile crept to his lips.

"I am in port first," he whispered, and with a strangling sob, a sudden twitch of all his limbs, his life passed away.

CHAPTER XXIX

AMONGST THE ARABS

JACK felt the hot tears running down his cheeks. To escape the wrath of the sea, and to die by a chance-shot a moment afterwards—this surely was the last cruelty of fate. It almost broke his heart to see a spirit so brave quenched so suddenly. He was hardly conscious of the rush of feet on every side of him, of the dirty hands that seized him, the dark, wild faces that stared at him with questioning and pitiless eyes.

He struggled up, on fire with anger. His tall figure, his threatening brows, the flame of wrath in his eyes for a moment cowed them.

"You brutes!" he cried.

The effect of his wrathful eyes and threatening gestures was but momentary. He was a single man, unarmed and crippled, and the Arabs closed on him. He was seized roughly by a dozen dirty brown hands, while the black eyes flashed and the white teeth gleamed in the swarthy faces. He would have fared badly, but the chief thrust himself into the struggling group, and in a high, shrill voice and with furious blows rescued the prisoner. He was, Jack thought, the most villainous-looking figure in the whole band. His lean and wrinkled face was surmounted by a mat of

grizzled hair. The gums behind his thin lips were toothless. He was of a great age; but the eyes under his shaggy brow were particularly alert and burned with cruel fire.

For some reason, however, he wished to preserve from injury the captive who had fallen into his hands; and, having rescued Jack from his angry followers, he ordered him with a brief gesture to follow. The whole band climbed the rugged front of the cliff with the nimbleness of monkeys, Jack following them with difficulty. Grant was left to the sea-birds, with the sea he loved to chant his requiem.

A couple of miles from the coast, in a tiny valley, was the Arab camp, a cluster of low tents, some of skin, some of dark-brown cloth. A dozen women in ragged dress, with a screen of dirty cloth over each face, came out of the tents as the band returned, while a score of half-naked children gathered round Jack with shrill cries and impish curiosity. The shiekh squatted in front of the principal tent, the rest of the Arabs forming a circle about him, and began to interrogate his captive. But as the questions were in Arabic Jack could only shake his head by way of answer; he spoke in English, and, as that failed, in French.

At the sound of French the listening Arabs grew interested, and a youthful member of the band was thrust to the front, and to Jack's surprise addressed him in broken French. Jack explained, with much confidence, that he was English; but if he expected that circumstance to be a recommendation to his captors he was quickly undeceived. A clamour of angry voices arose when what their prisoner had said was interpreted to them, a dozen dirty brown

arms were in the air together, knives were once more flourished; but the sheikh, in a voice shriller than any of his followers, hushed the tumult. Jack's despatches were then examined, but it was plain that nobody in the camp could read them.

Much excited speech followed, but finally Jack was dismissed from the circle with a brief gesture. He was inexpressibly weary, and flung himself down under the scanty shelter of a little thorn-bush. A woman with a corner of a dirty *haik* drawn over her features presently brought him a dish of barley-meal and milk. She was fat and good-natured, and Jack, with many gesticulations, persuaded her to pour water over the splints of the broken arm, thoroughly soaking the bandages.

His ill fate, Jack guessed, had thrown him into the hands of a band of Arabs who were in league with the French. The French, it is true, had not many such allies. When the expedition landed, Bonaparte announced that he had come to deliver Egypt from the oppression of the Mamelukes, and many Egyptians had flocked to his standard, drawn by the hope of freedom; but that delusion had long since perished. The French, it was found, ruled more sternly than even the Mamelukes, and, as the suppression of the revolt in Cairo showed, could punish more mercilessly. Some scattered Arab septs were still, however, on the side of the French, if for no better reason than that some tribe with which they were at war was on the other side. There was, too, a highly profitable trade to be carried on with the French camps. They bought horses, cattle, fodder, etc., and the Arab is a born-trader.

The Arabs into whose hands Jack had fallen were on their way, as many signs showed, to the French headquarters. This explained the drove of horses and lean cattle with them. They had decided, Jack further guessed, that he was a prize whom the French would value, and they would carry him to Acre (just then being besieged by the French) in the hope of being paid a good round sum. On the whole, he judged his life was safe. If he were surrendered to the French, indeed, the old ties of comradeship betwixt himself and Bonaparte might prove useful.

As night came on the wind fell, and Jack, almost too tired to sleep, lay on the sand. He thought of Grant, his naked body lying unburied within call of the sea; but the brave and loyal spirit was beyond reach of ill. Then Jack looked up to the sky, the night sky of the East, its profound depths gleaming with the flame of innumerable stars. There was peace in the high, calm heavens—a peace that seemed to rebuke the trouble of his heart. Into those high realms of calm and beauty Grant's brave soul had passed.

Jack recalled the experiences of the wreck: the storm, the black and leaping seas, the long hours of darkness and waiting. At least he was better off, and perhaps safer, lying on the sand in the slumbering Arab camp than on the shaking deck of the ill-fated *Sylph*. Presently the moon rose, a disc of pure silver, and flooded sky and earth with its mysterious light. The white, magic beauty of the night soothed him, its divine hush and calm seemed to creep into the very cells of his brain. His fat friend, with the dirty *haik* over her face, had flung him a ragged blanket; and, drawing this about him, Jack slept.

In the early morning, while the stars still shone faintly in the sky, the camp was broken up and the march begun. For some reason, the Arabs would not wait even for the plunder of the wreck. They had, Jack guessed, some feud with the Arabs of the neighbourhood, and they hurried on their march like men who were crossing the territory of an enemy. Grant had told him they were somewhere in the neighbourhood of El Ariah; and Jack hoped the band might make for that place or for Jaffa. Both places were in the occupation of the French, and he knew he would be safer in a French camp than amongst the Arabs. But for some reason the old sheikh at the head of the band swung off to the right, and they travelled all day on a line diverging from the sea.

The march was fast, and though the Arabs camped during the midday hours they travelled far into the night. On the second day the blue Judean hills were visible to the right; but the Arabs kept to the west of Hebron, carefully avoiding all the villages. The country was dry and treeless. Sometimes it became a mere stretch of sand, and although it was one of the cool months of the year the heat was scorching.

On the third day the track led them along the foothills of the great range, and Jack looked with keen interest on the crest of hills showing in clear-cut purple against the sky above them. Behind those hills lay Jerusalem; and as he gazed on the steep hill-slopes the words of an old psalm began to sing themselves, like some deep, harmonious chant, in his brain: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help."

How many generations of dead saints had gazed with eyes of longing and faith on those hills, and followed the slope of the azure summits to the deeper azure of the Eastern sky above them! And in his heart Jack repeated the words of ancient trust, "My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: He that keepeth thee will not slumber."

As the days went by, and the pain of his broken arm grew less and it was clear the bones were reknitting, Jack's natural courage revived. He studied the Arabs keenly. They reminded him in some odd way of his old comrades in the lanes in Paris. These Arabs were the Rats of Paris grown a little older and a little dirtier, set under a new sky and equipped with a new set of habits, but with most of the impish and irresponsible characteristics of the Rats; their capacity for unnecessary cruelty, their childishness of intellect, linked to some qualities of impish adroitness and cleverness. Jack felt sure that he could establish some influence over them, and perhaps bend them in the long run to his will, if by any ill-chance he failed to gain French protection.

On the fourth day the curve of the hills thrust their track westward towards the sea, and in the afternoon, from the summit of a low hill, a long stretch of blue water became visible. Jack searched the clear skyline with eager eyes. At one point a leaning triangular patch of silver was visible, the topmast of some ship, perhaps an English cruiser; but it was far off, and melted into the silver of the sky while he stared at it.

Their track still ran westwards till it almost

touched the brown sands of the beach, and the salt air of the sea was in their nostrils. Just as the sun was setting, round a jutting headland came a great ship. She was so close to the shore that Jack could see the white line of hammocks along the bulwarks, and the red jacket of a marine showed—a speck of crimson—on the quarterdeck. She was a fine two-decker under easy sail, under topsails and jib alone. A gust of wind blew out from her topmast the British flag. It was plainly one of the squadron off Acre, and poor Jack gazed at her with longing eyes. That stately ship represented the might of the British navy. It had the men and speech of his race on board. For him it meant freedom and comradeship, and it was almost within hailing distance.

An officer—a middy by his dress—jumped into the ratlines and levelled his glass at them. Some sharp eyes had discovered the Arabs. The spectacle of the great ship so near had, meanwhile, arrested the whole band. They were staring wide-eyed at her, and discussing her with eager voices. But the old sheikh gave a shrill word of command and led the way hurriedly round the shoulder of the hill, and the ship passed out of sight.

CHAPTER XXX

IN THE FRENCH CAMP

LATE on the sixth day the old sheikh, who was riding at the head of the party, suddenly stopped and sat with bent and listening head as though to catch some far-off sound. The whole band halted, and more than one scrambled from his camel and stooped with ear to the ground. Then they talked eagerly together, with many gesticulations. Presently Jack himself could hear a faint, deep sound; it seemed high in the air, and rose and fell as if in waves. He recognised the sound at last. It was the far-off thunder of guns. It presently died away. But he knew that what he had heard was the sound of the French batteries in front of Acre.

From this point the curving sea-horizon stretched before them, the sea itself lying like an azure lake, pricked with the white of sails at a dozen points. Just before sunset, as they rode to the summit of a gentle incline, Acre came in sight. The whole scene lay in the sunset haze like a map; the low point, like the blunted head of a spear, thrust out into the sea, and crossed where it joined the land by a line of low, gray crenellated walls. On either flank some warships were lying at regular intervals, so as to

cover the approach to the walls with their guns. In the foreground were squares and parallelograms of tents—plainly the French camp. Betwixt the tents and the walls of Acre were the French batteries.

As they gazed on the scene some faint jets of smoke were visible from one of these batteries; then came the sullen blast of the guns. A splash of sudden flame from two or three points in the walls answered the French battery.

The Arabs rode steadily across the plain towards the camp. A dozen groups—some on donkeys piled with trusses of hay, some on foot with tiny droves of cattle and goats—were converging towards it. A squad of cavalry rode out as they came near, but went past them without taking any notice of them. Jack scanned them eagerly, the brown, reckless faces, the faded uniforms, the glittering scabbards. Presently, as they reached the camp, there was a sharp challenge, "*Halte!*" and a French sentry stepped from the shade of a tent into the middle of the track. He was a little man, his face burnt brown with the sun, his uniform ragged, his long boots broken and tied with string. But the attitude was alert, the challenge sharp, the eye keen and bold; and, while he wore nothing of the gay trappings of a holiday-soldier, his musket was clean and the bayonet flashed brightly in the sun.

Jack looked curiously at the little martial figure, with the ragged dress and the alert and masterful look. He was a new type of soldier, and one quite undreamed of at Brienne; the soldier not of the Bourbons but of the Revolution. Nay, as Jack gazed he realised that the sentry belonged to a more formidable type still. He was something more than

the product of the Revolution, just as the hard basaltic rock is something different from the red lava shot from a volcano. This was a soldier of what the alarmed world was beginning to know as the Napoleonic type —the type that had overrun Italy, and broken the pride of Austria, and was to do still greater things not yet dreamed of.

Meanwhile the Arabs had drawn together. The young fellow who spoke, or tried to speak, French was thrust to the front, and a corporal at the sound of voices came forward. Jack broke in on the group, though the old sheikh tried to keep him back.

"I am English," he said. "I was shipwrecked ten days ago, and have fallen into the hands of these fellows, who shot my companion. Frenchmen," he added, "respect misfortune."

The corporal threw up his hand in salute.

"*Oui, monsieur*, but you must tell the officer of the guard your story."

The officer of the guard was summoned. He was a man past middle life, with grizzled moustache, sullen brows, and bitter mouth. Jack recognised the type; he had seen it often on the Boulevards of Paris. Lieutenant Ricord was one of the dark spirits of the Revolution, a Jacobin somehow turned soldier. He had probably fought at Valmy against Brunswick, and had kept some of his revolutionary ideas under the suns both of Italy and Egypt. He glanced sourly at Jack as he listened to his story.

"What were you doing," he asked curtly, "in Egyptian waters? Are you an officer?"

"No, a civilian." Jack hesitated a moment, then added, "In the employ of the Foreign Office."

"*Un diplomat!*" said the officer contemptuously.

Meanwhile the old sheikh had thrust forward his interpreter, who explained that the Englishman was their prisoner, and had been brought to the French headquarters as he and his despatches were of value, and the French would no doubt pay well for them.

"The General must see you," decided the officer. And Jack was marched under guard through the camp, the old sheikh and his interpreter following.

The camp was drawn out in orderly lines, but it seemed to the wondering eyes of Jack full of disorder. Soldiers were lying about playing cards, women were abundant, most of them young black girls. There was much screaming and shouting. Jack was astonished to see so few men in camp; there seemed more girls and camp-followers than soldiers. Corporal Lebrun, who marched beside him, explained that the General had gone out to join Kléber, who was marching at speed to intercept a big Turkish army—"thirty thousand strong," Corporal Lebrun added—striking at their communications from the eastward.

The little group halted in front of a tent before which a sentry patrolled, or rather lounged. The officer led the way in, Jack following, and with a careless salute told the prisoner's story. General Dugua was courteous but brusque. Jack explained that he was known personally to the Commander-in-Chief, had been a fellow-student with him at Brienne, and was sure of his good offices.

"You shall see him when he returns to camp." Then, glancing at Jack's bandaged arm, the French General asked, "Are you wounded?"

"No, but my arm was broken in the shipwreck."

"A surgeon shall see you at once; but," he added, "do you give your parole?"

"Am I a prisoner?" asked Jack with some indignation. "I am a non-combatant, flung into your camp by accident and against my own will. Do you treat me as a prisoner?"

"Yes, until your case is dealt with. You must either be kept under guard or give your parole."

Jack hesitated for a moment, then gave the required pledge, and went off in company with Corporal Lebrun to the hospital tent, leaving the old Arab sheikh and his interpreter in eager conference with the General. At the hospital tent his arm was examined by a gray-haired surgeon. He took off poor Grant's splints and felt the arm with skilful fingers.

"You are a fortunate man," he said. "The best surgeon could not have set the arm better. The junction of the bones is perfect, there is no inflammation. I will put new splints on, but these have done their work perfectly."

Jack told the story of how poor Grant bound up his arm. A cluster of surgeons gathered round and examined the bandages and the splints curiously while they listened.

"An English seaman made these splints with a knife!" at last said the surgeon. "It is wonderful. A bit of wood, a knife, and the lining of a coat, and the best surgeon in Paris could not have done it better. Monsieur," he repeated, "is fortunate."

The next day—it was April 17—a cavalry officer with a orderly came riding at speed into the camp. His uniform was white with dust, but his face was

smoke-blackened, and there was a bandage round his forehead. He brought news from the Commander-in-Chief, and the tidings ran through the camp like wildfire. A great victory had been won at Mount Tabor. The Turkish army had been destroyed, it was nothing short of a massacre. The guns in every battery fired a rejoicing salute, and were answered sullenly from the walls of Acre.

The next morning Bonaparte and his staff came riding in, and the whole camp was a tumult of cheering. Jack stared at his old comrade with eager eyes. He was older and stouter than when he had last seen him, the yellowish complexion was burnt a deep brown, but the look of command on his features was unmistakable. A score of battles had written their signature on them indelibly. Behind him was his staff, a group of men with names famous already, but destined to be memorable—Marmont was there, Lannes, Davout, Lefebvre, Desnouette. It was a cluster of keen and fighting faces, with the smoke of battle still upon them. They were excited, calling with laughter to each other as they answered the salutes of their comrades; but Bonaparte rode ahead, a figure inexplicably different from the rest. His face wore a fixed air of absorbed command. He seemed to be looking at something beyond the shouting crowd about him. The forward look, the impassive features were curiously impressive.

Suddenly Bonaparte pulled up his horse and fixed his eyes on the walls of Acre. A Turkish flag was flying from the summit of the tower, and as the wind blew its folds open a crescent could be seen on it. Then came a spark of red flame from a gun on the tower itself. The Turks were firing an answering

challenge to the tumult of the camp. Bonaparte's forehead was knitted for a moment into a black and answering frown. The line of broken, stubbornly held wall stretched betwixt him and his dreams.

With Bonaparte's arrival the French camp was stirred into instant activity. All the afternoon the guns from the batteries thundered angrily. At night, as he lay in his bed in the hospital tent, Jack heard the steady tramp of feet go past. Presently there was a roar of musketry at the foot of the great breach. It was a night attack, and Jack hurried from the tent to watch. There was a quick, sustained flash of musketry running along the foot of the wall, a hundred spear-points of fire darting upward. This was the French attack. The spray of red upward-darting points climbed like an ascending wave, with many quick ebbs, almost to the parapet of the walls. The French were succeeding. At one point in the walls the spray of fire ran wedge-shaped to the very crest.

"That is the breach," said the surgeon, who stood near, "and," he added, with excitement, "our men are winning."

But the edge of answering fire from the summit of the walls—countless points of *downward*-thrusting flame—never ceased, while from either flank the warships were thundering on the attacking columns. The line of musketry fire that marked the French advance seemed to shrink. It sank backward. The attack had failed.

Presently the columns came back broken and confused, and details thronged in with wounded men to the hospital tent. For hours the surgeons were busy. Amongst the wounded Jack found his friend

Corporal Lebrun waiting, with a broken arm, for his turn with the surgeon.

"We have attacked twelve times already," he explained. "This was the thirteenth time. I knew it would be unlucky."

Jack smiled at this sign of superstition in a French soldier who looked upon religion itself as a sort of exploded shell, something to be thrown away. It recalled his old schoolmaster Lepitre.

"The rascals," Corporal Lebrun went on, "attack us almost as often as we attack them, and the guns of your ships take us in flank when we try to climb the breach. Acre," he added bitterly, "is defended by Europeans, and we are attacking it *à la Turque*."

This Jack found out afterwards was the bitter and common jest of the camp; but when Kléber at last used the phrase to Bonaparte it was an unforgiven and unforgotten insult.

Late the next afternoon Jack was told that the General would see him. An orderly took him to a large tent, in front of which a flag was flying; a sentry stood on guard with an unsoldierly air of ease, a sergeant's guard lounged in a tent close by. Jack entered the tent. At the table sat an officer in the uniform of a general of brigade; Bonaparte was standing, his hands behind his back, in an attitude which painters have made familiar for all time, his head bent in meditation. He looked up as Jack entered, but gave no sign of friendliness. His eyes dwelt on the sea-stained dress Jack still wore and his generally battered aspect.

"Well," he said at last, "this is worse than Brienne or Paris," and a smile for an instant lit up the dark face.

Jack told the story of his adventures, while Bonaparte listened without comment.

"You should have accepted my offer," he said at last. "You flung away a career when you refused it. What do you want me to do?"

Jack felt chilled by the coolness of his old comrade. "I am not a prisoner," he replied. "I was cast ashore by the wreck of my ship, yet I have been required to give my parole. I have a right to ask that you shall send me under a flag of truce to one of the British ships."

General Reynier, who was sitting at the table, and had been watching Jack, at this point whispered something in Bonaparte's ear. Bonaparte shook his head, but Reynier persisted, whispering eagerly, while Bonaparte's eyes dwelt with a moody look on Jack.

"I am busy," at last he said abruptly. "I must inquire into the matter." And Jack found himself dismissed.

Something, it was clear, had been suggested by Reynier—something mysterious affecting himself—and Jack puzzled his brain over the subject. Bonaparte had not shown any signs of friendly feeling. He seemed to have forgotten the ties of old days. But why should he keep him a prisoner, and what was it Reynier had whispered in his ear?

Days passed while Jack waited and fretted. The besiegers were now driving mines with furious energy towards the city; one more attack had been hurled against the breach, and had failed. Jack seemed forgotten. One evening, however, he was summoned to General Reynier's tent.

"The Commander-in-Chief," that officer explained,

"will see you, but there are difficulties in the way of sending you aboard one of the British ships."

"There ought to be no difficulty. I am not a combatant. I am in your hands as the result of a disaster which entitles me to respect and compassion."

"But there are complications. The Arabs claim you as their prisoner."

"And will Frenchmen leave a European and a Christian in the hands of Mohammedan savages?"

"They are not savages. They are our allies. The General must be diplomatic; he cannot afford to offend his allies. He has something to propose to you to-night, and, monsieur," added Reynier gravely, "I advise you to fall in with his wishes."

Jack was strangely puzzled as he walked back to his tent. What could the Commander-in-Chief have to propose to him except his release?

Late that night an orderly summoned Jack to the Commander-in-Chief's tent. Bonaparte was alone, and his face, seen by the light of the flickering lamp, was inscrutable.

"Laurente," he said, going straight to his purpose, "you are claimed by the sheikh as his prisoner, and I cannot afford to quarrel with my allies."

"I did not know the French Commander-in-Chief was so careful of Arab susceptibilities, or that the alliance of Arabs was so necessary to a French army."

Bonaparte's eyes flashed for a moment; but he went on, "When we separated in Paris you refused the career I offered you. But you have been flung in my path again. It is fate. The wreck and the Arabs are but its instruments. I will send you in to Acre under

a flag of truce, and you can join your countrymen. You can even take these despatches with you," he said, pointing with a gesture of contempt to a document lying on the table.

Jack began to express his thanks.

But Bonaparte went on, with a raised voice, "There is one condition. Those fools"—and he jerked his hand angrily in the direction of Acre—"are holding out in hope of relief. I crushed one relieving army at Mount Tabor, now they are expecting another from Rhodes. I have definite and sure intelligence that the scheme is abandoned; the destruction of Abdullah Pasha's army at Mount Tabor has settled that. You must take the news into Acre, and must assure Djezzar, on your honour, of its truth. It will save further waste of blood."

"Why not send in the news yourself under a flag of truce?"

"They will not believe it; but they will believe it coming from an Englishman, an agent of the Foreign Office."

"And for that reason I cannot take it. But if I accepted your offer," Jack added, after a moment's pause, "what security have you that when I am safely in the lines at Acre I should carry your message? Or, if I carried it, why should I not explain that it was only a trick?"

"I can rely on your word," said Bonaparte.

"But why should not I lie? Truth and falsehood, you once told me, are only tools; and a wise man will use either at his convenience."

"Ah, my poor Laurente, I know you. So I pay you the compliment of trusting you. You have what

you call a conscience. It may be stubbornness, it may be honour; but you will keep your word."

"Perhaps they would believe me in Acre," said Jack bitterly, "as I am not French; but the message is a trick, and I shall not carry it."

Bonaparte looked at him. "You have learned nothing," he said, "and you have missed everything, because you are stupid."

"At least I have kept my conscience unsoiled."

"But you pay the price of that luxury in a ragged coat and a ruined career. The Arabs claim you as their property. You will be their slave, and you do not guess how cruel that slavery is. I shall not take you out of their hands except on the terms I named."

"Then," said Jack, "I must remain their slave."

CHAPTER XXXI

NAPOLEON'S "GRAIN OF SAND"

AFTER the interview with Bonaparte, Jack for a while seemed forgotten. Days of waiting followed, which he might well have found intolerable but for the fierce drama of the siege in progress on every side of him. The fury of conflict at the front ebbed and flowed, but never really ceased. The fighting impulse behind the walls was as fierce as that in front of them, and almost every attack was followed by a counter-attack. The siege lasted sixty days, and when its stern arithmetic was afterwards computed it was found there had been forty attacks and twenty-six sorties, or more than one fierce and general combat for every day of the siege. Jack thus had the opportunity—given to few of his time—of seeing day after day, and at close quarters, how Napoleon's veterans fought.

On May 7 Kléber's division marched in from Mount Tabor. Jack watched the men streaming in, and it seemed to his wondering eyes a mob rather than a division of disciplined troops fresh from a great victory. They came in loose order, with noisy clamour of voices. Their uniforms were ragged and dusty, they were laden with booty. But the men had some at least of the qualities of veterans. Their arms were

clean and in perfect order. A touch of pride—not to say boastful swagger—was in their gait, for the wine of victory ran hot in their blood.

Kléber was riding at their head, and his huge stature and lion-like face awoke the shouts of the men from the camp when the swarm of soldiers poured out to meet them.

"*You* can take Acre," they cried; and certainly to the victors in the great fight at Mount Tabor the task looked simple. The great triangular breach in the stretch of the low gray wall seemed to offer an easy path for daring feet. The tower that flanked it was jagged with shot-wounds. Behind those frail defences were only Turks and British sailors.

In the veins of Kléber's men, like the intoxication of strong wine, was the elation of success, and Jack heard that sound—not often raised in more sober camps—the shout of whole regiments clamouring to be led to the attack. They could do what the brigades of Lannes, of Davoût, of Menou, and of Rimbaud had not done.

Bonaparte was not the captain to waste such a mood in his soldiers. Quickly the word came for the assault. Kléber's men were to be let loose.

They fell swiftly into column, the officers took their places with drawn swords, the grenadiers, with their tall shakos, ran to the front. Almost at a breath the "mob" became a disciplined force, and in what seemed to Jack's astonished eyes an incredibly brief period of time the attack was launched. He had watched the breach attempted at least half-a-dozen times, and attempted gallantly; but the whip of fire from the ships on either flank and the line of darting musketry flames

from above invariably wrecked the assault. The mass of stormers would cling to the lower slopes of the breach. Single figures would break out of it, run upwards to the crest, and shrivel like human chips in the flame of musketry fire. The slope after an hour's conflict would be splashed with blood and thick with the bodies of the fallen dead, but the breach itself would remain unscaled.

This time the attack was weightier and more formidable, and it was driven home with more resolute purpose. The column swept up to the very crown of the breach, unchecked, with one fierce impulse. Jack could see one cluster of stormers after another leap, with muskets lifted high in their hands, down the inner side. "They win! They win!" went up in shouts from the batteries.

Then a tumult of sound arose inside the walls, there was the sustained and angry crackle of musketry fire, the upward impulse of the column was arrested, there was a struggle on the crest of the breach. Then back —a stream of flying figures, almost as though shot from some great catapult—came the stormers; but where many had leaped down within the walls only few returned. The upward stream had been dense and thick, the returning human current was only a trickle of straggling and flying soldiers.

For many minutes the arrested attack clung to the lower slopes of the breach, while the front seemed to constantly shrivel under the fire from the walls. Kléber stood midway, his huge figure, his fierce gestures visible from the batteries; then past him, and finally sweeping him away with it, came the backward swirl of the defeated column, a tumult of breathless,

furious, defeated men. A dozen times over Jack saw some officer with waving sword lead the men immediately about him a few steps up the breach, but steadily like the reflux of a wave the group swung back again. All the madness, the valour, the horror of a stormed breach was visible.

Within easy sight of the conflict was a little rising ground called the Mound of Cœur de Lion; and on its summit a greater soldier than Richard the Lion-hearted stood and watched the fight. Bonaparte, with folded arms and chin on breast, stared at the scene from that spot, a group of officers behind him. To the left the sea was thick with white sails. It was the Turkish fleet from Rhodes at last in sight; but its sails hung idly, for no breath of wind was stirring. Boats full of soldiers were pulling fast to land. It was a race betwixt the coming boats and the furious stormers on the breach, and the boats won!

Jack was near enough to the group on the mound to see their faces. The little cluster of orderlies and aides behind Bonaparte watched the struggle with fierce gesticulations and loud clamour of passionate speech; but Bonaparte himself stared at the scene in silence, with frowning brow and unmoved face. When the fight at the breach was abandoned, and Kléber's men came streaming back into the camp, Jack saw Bonaparte riding through them. His face was fixed and expressionless. He seemed to look with unseeing eyes at the wild spectacle about him, the broken groups of soldiers —breathless, exhausted, many of them wounded. It was plain that quite another scene was present to his mind. It was a vision of shattered dreams. "A grain of sand," he said bitterly at St. Helena, years afterwards, "undid

all my projects." And Acre was the grain of desert sand that had stayed the iron car of the great captain. That low wall, rent with more than one breach, had somehow proved a barrier which all his genius and the utmost valour of his soldiers could not cross. And, as Bonaparte rode amongst his defeated soldiers, what rose before his vision was a landscape of wrecked hopes.

After the failure of Kléber's men came a pause of mere exhaustion in the siege. The guns in the batteries spat little jets of flame at the walls, but for three days there was no fresh attack. On the fourth was a new assault of a languid sort; but Bonaparte had shot his last bolt. All through the night which followed, Jack heard the roll of wheels, the tramp of feet go past his tent. Looking out he saw convoys of wounded, of guns, and stores go streaming through the darkness. There was the same spectacle all the next day. The siege was abandoned, and Jack realised that he had witnessed the first great failure of his old comrade.

Meanwhile, what was to be his own fate? His parole bound him, or he would have attempted to reach Acre. It seemed as if he were forgotten. But at midnight, while the stream of stores and guns was still flowing past his tent, an orderly roused him with the news that Lieutenant Ricord, from General Reynier, required his presence.

The scowl on the lieutenant's brow was darker than ever, the gloom of his long, stern face deeper; his arm was carried in a sling. He had plainly been wounded in the last attack. The old sheikh was by his side, a couple of Arabs behind him.

Lieutenant Ricord curtly explained that the Arabs claimed him as their prisoner, and he was to be

surrendered to them. Jack expostulated, but the only answer was the brief phrase, "By General Reynier's orders." Jack demanded to see Bonaparte himself, and was sternly told that the Commander-in-Chief had better work to do that night.

"Does he know that I am to be given back like a slave to these Arabs?"

Lieutenant Ricord only shrugged his shoulders in reply. "Do you withdraw your parole?" he asked.

"Yes," said Jack fiercely.

The French officer spoke a few words to one of the Arabs, and then turned away without a salute; and in the light of the torches flaming near Jack saw the cruel smile on his grim features. At that moment he felt some one pluck his arm. It was Corporal Lebrun, who without a word thrust a little parcel into his hands, and then disappeared in the darkness with a gesture of farewell. When, later, Jack opened that parcel he found it contained a pistol, with powder-flask and bullets, a useful but somewhat ominous gift.

The old sheikh, having first tied Jack's hands behind his back and fastened his wrist by a rope to the saddle of one of his followers, rode off through the darkness, his prisoner running with stumbling feet beside the camels. A trot of a couple of miles brought them to the camp, and, with his hands still fastened behind his back, Jack sat on the ground till daybreak.

Already he had noted that the Arabs were curiously cheerful, and he guessed it was because they had got their money and their prisoner too. Had Reynier, vexed that his plan for sending the Englishman into Acre with a misleading message had failed, thrust him back into the hands of the Arabs without Bonaparte's

knowledge or consent? Jack hoped this was the case, but he never knew.

The next morning the Arabs struck camp and started in what Jack, judging by the sun, saw was a south-eastern course. Drawing a mental plan of the surrounding country as best he could, he guessed their track would strike the head of the Gulf of Suez. He knew that they belonged to Upper Egypt, where all the Beys—as General Baird found afterwards—were in the French interest. The mingled attractions of war and trade had brought this particular band to the Mediterranean coast; and they would, no doubt, have clung to the French as long as they were successful. But they had seen their failure in front of Acre, and, laden with booty, they were now on their way back to their native oasis.

As he realised the vast stretch of country—huge spaces of it mere waterless desert—they must cross, Jack's heart almost sank. But his courage was high. He vowed he would escape at any risk. He looked round on the figures about him. They were true Bedouins, children of the desert, lean, hardy, tireless; but in knowledge, in daring, in energy he felt that he was their superior. A flame of scorn kindled in his blood at the thought of being a slave to such a group. Corporal Lebrun's pistol was safely hidden in his dress, and he resolved he would be free or die.

All day long his brain was busy with plans. His chance, he decided, would come in the darkness of the night; but for the first few days the Arabs, passing through a hostile country, were sleeplessly alert, and Jack found he must wait with what patience he could till they were near the head of the Gulf of Suez and on

the very fringe of the desert. Then the guard would be less vigilant, and he would make a dash for the sea-coast.

At night as he lay on the sand his thoughts flew across the sea to London. He could see, as if painted on the screen of the darkness, his aunt's kindly features, his uncle's square and lawyer-like brow. But outlasting these was the face of Denise inexpressibly vivid and sweet. What must they think of his disappearance? Did they mourn for him as dead?

Meanwhile, in London, the weeks went by after the *Sylph* had sailed, and in those days of slow communication no anxiety was felt at the absence of any news from the ship. But the weeks grew into months, and still no letters came. Wonder at the absence of any intelligence sharpened into anxiety, an anxiety that quickly grew almost too deep for words. Jack seemed to be swallowed up in some gulf of silence. Robert Lawrence took it all with a philosophy that distressed Denise and made his wife sharp-tongued with vexation. He was scolded into interviewing the officials both of the Admiralty and of the Foreign Office. Instructions were sent to the squadron off the coast of Syria to make special inquiries after the *Sylph*, but all in vain. The ill-fated ship had vanished.

Denise was silent; but, as her aunt complained to her husband, her eyes seemed like interrogation points. She wore the face of one who is always listening for a message that never came.

"She is fretting her heart out," said Mrs. Lawrence. "She is persuading herself that for whatever disaster has befallen her lover she is to blame. She sent him to the East." And this was true. Denise was

consumed by a grief through which ran the bitterness of remorse.

"Aunt," she said one day, "I cannot bear it. I sent him! I sent him! And I feel that if anything has happened to him his blood lies on my conscience. And oh, I loved him! I know now how much I loved him! And I never told him, but sent him away to some dreadful fate. Why did I set my girl's judgment against his?"

"Nonsense, child," cried her aunt. You did right; and the consequences of doing what is right never broke anybody's heart yet. And, my dear," she added softly, "no love is safe against loss."

"Ah!" said Denise, "if God had taken him I should have mourned for him, and have gone to my grave unwedded for him. But I should not feel as I feel now that I had sent him to his grave."

She recalled every look in his face, every tone in his voice, and realised how love for him was woven in every fibre of her nature.

Robert Lawrence was still hopeful. "Jack," he said, "has as many lives as a cat. Paris could not kill him, nor M. Duclos. He survived the September horrors. He is a fellow of endless resource, and will float where ninety-nine men out of every hundred would drown. Behind the mask of his quiet face is as keen a wit as you will find in a human head anywhere. He will turn up again, little one; and if we let you fret your bright eyes dim with idle fears he will never forgive us."

Mrs. Lawrence did her best to persuade Denise to give up her work and come and live with them; but Denise shook her head.

"Work is a medicine, and while I am busy at it I

almost forget;" and the smile with which she said this seemed to Mrs. Lawrence sadder than any tears could be. But Denise went on, "I want a new kind of work. The way to make one's own trouble light is to try to lighten the troubles of others. I made that discovery in the Abbaye. I used to forget for a while my own fear and distress when I was nursing the sick child of some poor wife whose husband had gone to the guillotine. I often pass dark and filthy courts, and see in them little children hungry, untaught, and half-naked. If uncle will find the money I will visit one of these courts a couple of afternoons every week, and try and help the poor people there."

Robert Lawrence, when the plan was explained, first vowed that the scheme was quixotic, and that Denise was a fool to risk her health and waste her time in trying to help the poor wretches in the slums. But he ended by putting all the money Denise needed in her hands, and she plunged into this new work. She undertook it at first as a sort of nepenthe for her own tormented thoughts, but she learned by degrees to act on a loftier motive; and her work reacted on her, giving a new strength to her will, a deeper sweetness to her character, a strange light of pitying serenity to her face. Robert Lawrence watched the change in Denise.

"My dear," he said to his wife one night, "what is happening to poor Jack nobody can guess, but Denise is being enriched by all this trouble. If the young fellow does come home and marry her he will have nothing less than a human angel for his wife."

"All good husbands have that happy experience," said Mrs. Lawrence, "though they are not always concious of it."

CHAPTER XXXII

IN THE DESERT

On the fourth day they struck the real desert, and Jack never forgot the spectacle: the vast, melancholy, empty landscape, as level as the sea and as measureless, but with a deeper loneliness lying on it than even the sea can know; no life of leaping waves, no music of wind-whipped waters, no gleam of leaning sail—a Dead Sea of sand; no shadow of bush or tree, no wing in the sky, not even of that feathered hunger the vulture; so empty of life that Jack felt that the sight of a lizard scurrying in the hot dust would have been welcome; a dead world, and, as he soon realised, above it a sky of fire.

The heat grew so intense towards noon that it was difficult to breathe. The gray floor of the desert seemed to undulate like water in the fiery atmosphere. Even the Arabs suffered. They sat on their camels with bowed heads in melancholy silence, plodding on in the still, unbreathing, intolerable heat. The sky was a flaming bowl above the scorched earth, and Jack felt that he and his companions were like a cluster of insects being grilled.

The sun went down in a sea of bloody colour.

Slowly the tints grew faint, the flames died on the rim of the horizon; and at last came the cool night, with its arch of vaulted blackness pricked with stars like spear-points of fire.

Jack thought nothing could exceed the suffering of that first day in the desert, but three days later came a still more terrible experience. A curious grayness seemed to creep over the sky. The slate-coloured landscape narrowed, a hot and strangling mist gathered about them; it was stirred with waves of heated air that presently grew into a breeze, and then beat upon them like a tempest blowing from the open doors of some great furnace. The blown sand driven into their faces pricked them as if they were needles of fire. For hours that dreadful and scorching wind blew. The Arabs halted, covered their heads with blankets, and sat with their backs to the gale. When at last the rush of fiery air ceased, Jack felt as he drew in each breath as though his very lungs were scorched.

Late that afternoon he saw to the west, above the haze that seemed to lie on the surface of the desert, a faint blue, jagged line. He guessed it must be the Sinaitic range, and betwixt it and them was the head of the Gulf of Suez. The time had come when he must make his dash for freedom.

He looked long and steadily at the distant peaks, and tried to adjust the whole landscape to what he remembered of the map so as to know what line to take when darkness fell. He must watch the first stars that rose, and so fix his course. He glanced round on the little band. The Arabs seemed careless and unobservant, and with a quickened pulse Jack saw the hour had come for a supreme effort. He had

managed to secrete some dates, he felt Corporal Lebrun's pistol hidden in the folds of his dress; he would steal a camel with its water-bag, and he determined grimly that at the cost of life—his own or others'—he would escape.

Night came slowly. The sun, a ball of red fire, seemed to linger on the horizon, its rays lay like diverging bars of crimson flame on the level sand. Jack watched with impatient eyes for the colours to fade. At last the huge red disc sank below the horizon, the cool night fell on them. The band camped, tents were put up, food taken from the packs for the scanty meal, fodder spread for the camels; and, sitting apart, Jack watched eagerly for the first star.

But no star came. The figures of the camels and of the Arabs about him seemed to fade. There was a blackness in the very atmosphere that deepened until it shut off all objects. He seemed to himself, somehow, in a cave of impenetrable gloom. The inky gloom pressed upon his very eyes. What strange eclipse was happening? As he sat he heard the crackling of the fire behind him, and turned to look at it, but he could see no fire. He heard sounds—the sounds of voices, of camels feeding, and an occasional laugh—but he could see nothing. He peered in every direction in vain. Were his senses failing him?

Then he began to tremble. The terrible fact crept into his consciousness: he was blind! He knew it without question or doubt. A cry broke from his lips. It seemed to arrest the attention of the Arabs, and he heard the sound of feet in the soft sand about him. The sheikh spoke to him harshly, but Jack made no answer. He stood trembling, with his hands pressed

hard on his eyes. Some one plucked his hands away, a rough finger and thumb parted the eyelids and held them apart for a moment. He heard the chatter of eager voices about him, and then a careless laugh. The Arabs moved away, and Jack stood alone. They had detected his blindness, and turned away with a laugh. So hard can men be!

He flung himself down and buried his face in the sand. He did not weep, but his body was shaken with dry, involuntary, convulsive sobs. A blind slave in the pitiless desert, and amongst men whose hearts were as destitute of compassion as the sands across which they rode! Escape henceforth was an idle dream. The darkness about him was a prison stronger than stone walls or iron bars could make. His very soul was shaken with the storm of passion and despair that swept through him.

He lay silent and almost heartbroken while the desolate hours crept past. It seemed in that dreadful experience as though God had forsaken him, or even was mocking him. Then his thoughts turned in a passion of grief to Denise. He tried to picture her face; but for some time it was as though his imagination as well as his eyes had been scorched into blindness. He could not call up the vision of her face. The disorder of his feelings seemed to paralyse his memory.

Then, in the darkness, obeying some blind, unreasoning impulse, he called to her aloud, "Denise! Denise! Denise!" An Arab sitting near stepped to his side and stooped over him with a laugh. What was the blind Kaffir saying?

At that very hour, in London, Denise turned in

her sleep. She awoke and sat up quickly. Some voice was whispering her name in the darkness about her. Thrice she heard herself called, "Denise! Denise! Denise!" The sound was faint, far off, as though coming to her across immeasurable distance; but she knew it was the voice of her lover. She sat wide-eyed in the darkness, trembling, listening. From what remote depths of space the voice seemed to come! But the whisper was not repeated, and she broke, she hardly knew why, into passionate weeping. The sadness of that thrice-repeated call seemed to rend her very heart.

Presently the weeping girl rose, slipped on her dressing-gown, and hurried along the passage to her aunt's room and knocked wildly at the door.

"Oh aunt!" she whispered, with streaming eyes and quivering lips, "Jack is calling me. I heard him. He called my name three times."

Her aunt looked at the white face, the dilated eyes of the trembling girl. She was too wise a woman to tell her it was only a dream. Perhaps the story, authenticated by the girl's passion of grief, touched some chord of superstition or of sympathetic imagination in Mrs. Lawrence's own breast. With an impulse of wise and pitying motherhood, she took Denise into her arms.

"My dear," she said, "I will stay with you for the rest of the night."

"But, aunt," said Denise, in a trembling voice, "can we do nothing?"

"Yes, my dear," she replied with decision, "we can pray;" and the two women fell at the bedside in silence.

If Jack could have seen the bent heads of the praying women so many thousands of miles away it might have soothed him. Perhaps some mystic sense of the love that was praying for him, or a dim, unconscious trust in the Love to which that prayer was addressed, fell on the poor fellow's spirit as he lay on the sand, for he slept.

CHAPTER XXXIII

IN THE DAWN

JACK slept for an hour the sleep of mental and physical exhaustion, then he awoke, and his thoughts were instantly busy with the dreadful fate which had befallen him. Could the Arabs help him? He mistrusted their skill, but he mistrusted still more profoundly their compassion. The loss of sight seemed absolute, but its suddenness puzzled him. He imagined that the intense light of the day had paralysed the optic nerve. Whether the injury was fatal he could not guess, he must simply bear his fate.

Men of his race and faith, he reflected, had borne disaster as cruel and kept their manhood. He set his teeth together in the darkness. He could at least endure. There crept into his memory a famous passage in the *Iliad*, the prayer of Ajax for light. It was one of the scanty bits of Greek that still lingered in his recollection, and with a bitter smile he whispered the sonorous lines.

But he wanted something better than pagan courage of this type. How did his faith stand the shock of such a disaster? He remembered the psalm that had sung its music in his brain at the sight of the Judean

hills: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills." But how could blind eyes look to any hills or to any heights of divine power and love above the hills of earth for help? The mystery of his trouble—the cruelty of it—to be smitten blind at the moment of escape, and so slavery itself to be made hopeless! How could faith itself emerge undestroyed from such a stroke?

Then into the cells of his brain crept the message of another psalm, "Thy way is in the sea. Thy paths are in the great waters, and Thy judgments are not known." A God beyond the reach of man's broken thought! Yet the message runs on, "Thou leddest thy people like a flock." Was the hand of God really leading him through these dark realms? "Clouds and darkness are round about Him"—poor Jack felt the truth of those words—but "righteousness and judgment are the habitations of His throne." Yes, God still lived, and shaped human life. And He shaped it to ends which, no matter how far off, were noble and good. And this life is not all.

Then Jack slept again. He awoke some hours afterwards, and lifted his head. Across the dreadful veil of darkness in which, he believed—as well he might—he must dwell for the rest of his life, was drawn a line of crimson. It grew richer, it broke into a glory of diverging rays—flaming lances of colour that shot upwards to the zenith. What strange vision breaking in on blind eyes was this? Then, in glad wonder, with arrested breath and trembling lips, Jack realised that the dawn was spread before his eyes—the sunrise, the arched immeasurable skies, the desert landscape. It was day. His blindness had gone! And no garden of dew-wet flowers, with the song of the

lark hung high in heaven above it, was ever half so beautiful as the stretch of brown and desolate sand.

His bewilderment was overpowering. His sight went, as by some dreadful stroke of magic, and went in a moment; but it had come back in a moment, and as if by some miracle. "The Lord," he whispered, "is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

The old sheikh presently came up and examined his eyes and turned away with a nod. It puzzled Jack that neither his sudden blindness at sunset nor his sudden recovery of sight when the dawn returned seemed to surprise the Arabs. All that day the music of gladness was in his blood. His escape, he believed, was only postponed for a few hours, and he commenced to study the landscape afresh so as to fix his course at night.

But at night the same mysterious darkness closed round him again. He was shut in it as in some strangling mist. Above him, he knew, were a myriad flaming stars, about him were the faces of his companions; but all was blotted out. He commenced to ask himself with breathless anxiety would the sight that so strangely forsook him come again with the dawn? He slept little that night, staring into the darkness and wondering if across its dreadful canvas would ever be drawn the red glory of returning day.

But with the dawn sight came back to him. Then he guessed what had happened to him. He was attacked by the curious night-blindness from which, as Corporal Lebrun had told him, many of the French soldiers suffered when they first came to Egypt. What

was its exact cause no one seemed to know. Perhaps it was that the iris of the unaccustomed eye contracted so closely under the white glare of the long day that it temporarily lost its power of dilation; and when the flood of scorching light was withdrawn the eye was for a time blinded. As a matter of fact, scores of soldiers in Abercrombie's army, when it landed in Egypt, suffered from exactly this recurring blindness—a complete loss of vision every night—an experience which stretched through weeks.

Jack's dread of being permanently blind was immensely lightened; but was ever an unhappy slave, he reflected, so beaten with disaster? The vivid, living world—the world of colour and form and movement—was withdrawn from him every night, and he was left shut up in a darkness which had all the offices of a prison. In the night lay his sole hope of escape; and now with each night there fell upon him a helplessness more complete than that of a child.

But though Jack mourned that lost chance of escape he made up his mind that it was only postponed. Other chances would offer themselves—or he would invent them. He had tasted the terror of blindness; and to find that he could still see the light made all other ills for the present seen trivial. From this point, indeed, an odd certainty of escape possessed him. Each miraculous return of vision seemed a message of hope, a symbol of supernatural and living forces busy about him.

For nearly a month this strange experience of alternating blindness and vision was repeated; and during the whole of that period the party pressed steadily southward, camping every third or fourth day

at some little oasis—a patch of verdure, with a few scanty shrubs, hidden in some hollow of the sand. The wells of the oasis were usually mere holes into which crept a trickle of water. With each day's journey to the south Jack knew escape grew more difficult, yet his courage never drooped.

The Arabs, after their first examination of his eyes, took no further notice of them. They understood the whole incident, and knew that the intermittent blindness would pass. But the three black slaves in the party were sullenly jealous of their white fellow-captive, and they found in the recurring spaces of his helplessness from blindness a safe opportunity of cruelty. They played endless tricks on him during the night. Some object—a saddle or a bundle of cloth—would be set in his path to make him stumble, and each fresh disaster was greeted with shouts of cruel laughter. One night by a trick they led him into the fire that was kindled, and his feet were cruelly burned. The jests grew yet more dangerous, and Jack knew he must stop them. The leader of these performances was a huge negro named Sidi, with arms which for reach and strength resembled those of an orang-outang. Jack looked at him steadily; the man's brute strength was immense, but it was clumsy as well as huge.

"A good English boxer," he said to himself, "could write some wholesome lessons on your flat nose and broad cheeks, my friend."

The tricks that night were more impish than usual. In the morning, as soon as his sight was clear, and before the camels were loaded for the march, Jack walked quietly up to Sidi, who was sitting in the sand devouring his breakfast. He clutched his short woolly

hair and lifted the astonished negro by it to his feet. He pointed to his eyes expressively by way of explanation, and in broken Arabic made it plain that he proposed to administer a sound thrashing by way of punishment for the ill-usage of the night.

The Arabs gathered round as though it had been a cock-fight, and with laughter explained to Sidi that he must fight the white man. With a menacing look the negro snatched a knife from his belt, but the old sheikh, who saw that Jack was armed with nothing better than his naked hands, struck the knife from Sidi's grasp. The negro looked at his opponent for a moment; then he put down his head like a ram, and with a roar of rage charged. Jack stepped lightly aside, and as the huge body of his opponent rushed past him struck on the broad naked back with the flat of his hand a resounding blow. A shout of laughter went up from the Arabs. Sidi turned, and with new access of fury leaped at his opponent, his long, baboon-like arms stretched out to grasp him. Jack sprang back; then, as his antagonist stopped, leaped in, and with his right and left struck in quick succession two furious blows on the negro's eyes.

"I will teach you," he thought grimly, "what blindness feels like."

Sidi came on again, but Jack, a good boxer, had no difficulty in repeating the punishment, ending by one tremendous blow on the negro's flat nose. The blood ran down his black face in hot streams, and with the running blood Sidi's fury seemed to slip out of him. He stood with both eyes swollen and closed, and his inky features reddened with blood. He was blind. Jack then turned to the two astonished blacks who had

looked on, and with expressive gestures explained that every morning he would avenge in that way the tricks of the night.

That night the two negroes expended their impish humour on Sidi, as being the safer victim of the two; and Jack guessed what was happening by their laughter and by the angry shouts of the huge negro. When morning came he trounced the two offenders, and made them understand that he would punish tricks on poor Sidi as though they had been tricks on himself.

Jack found that his victory over the huge negro had given him something more than immunity from insults on the part of his fellow-slaves. He had established that strange mastery of the white man over the black whose secret lies so far back in history or is hidden so deep in facts of mental and physical structure as to be beyond explanation. When Sidi found that the white slave who had thrashed him was yet his defender from the torments of his fellow-blacks his gratitude was dog-like. So complete became his influence over the blacks that Jack began to dream of joining them with him in a plot against the Arabs. But he looked at their faces afresh. It was clear that if they had the docility they had also the garrulity of children. They could not keep a plan secret for five minutes. He must depend on himself.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE SLAVE

THE wild landscape of the desert, a measureless waste of low sandhills that seemed to undulate beneath the white-heat which lies upon it; no wing of bird in the white-hot sky, no blade of grass or shadow of tree on the blistered earth.

On the crest of a low ridge of sand a figure is standing, shading his eyes with his hands as he watches the horizon to the north-west. He looks a true Bedouin, lean, bare-legged, brown-faced, a cotton cloth wound about his head, a ragged *haik* his only dress. Presently a second figure, a huge negro, his face black as ebony, climbs the ridge, leading a couple of camels. The negro laughs as the Bedouin speaks to him eagerly in Arabic and points to the horizon. The black stares long in the direction to which his companion's finger points, and then he shakes his head. He can see nothing. But the keener eyes of his companion can discern in the wavering horizon, dim in the heat-haze, a patch of steady purple. He claps the negro on the shoulder.

"*Thalatta*, Sidi—*thalatta!*"

The negro laughs contentedly in reply, though he does not understand his companion's words. A strange

Bedouin this that lifts up on the crest of that hill of sand the cry of Xenophon's Greeks when they saw the sea! Then the pair mount and ride away, the sand rising in white dust under every stroke of the camels' feet.

It is Jack Lawrence come back from the desert. "He is hard to kill," said his uncle, and this was certainly true. Nearly three years have gone by since, a semi-blind captive, plodding behind his master's camel, he disappeared in the heat-filled horizons of the great desert. He seemed to have vanished from human knowledge. In London they mourned for him as dead —all save Denise, to whom love taught, somehow, an obstinate hopefulness. And now Jack has come back out of the furnace of slavery, free, armed, unpursued, a companion by his side. He is aiming for one of the ports on the Gulf of Suez, and from the ridge of sand he had caught the first glimpse of the far-off purple sea.

The tale of his experiences as a slave would make a romance; but it was clear that slavery had set no evil mark on him as he stood erect and fearless on the sandhill. Yet there were some changes in him. The steady eyes were as honest as ever, but they had a new expression. Eyes that have looked on danger as a daily and familiar thing learn an intent watchfulness of glance no other eyes know. The face had new lines of sternness written on it. It wore the aspect of that rare strength which comes of suffering endured and conquered. It was a face that would have arrested attention in a crowd.

* * * * *

The Arabs on their homeward journey had travelled due south, halting every third or fourth day at some

little oasis, with its cluster of muddy wells. They were rich in booty, and their riches brought some perils with them. They might be plundered. They would be a temptation to every group of hungry Bedouins within a hundred miles. So Jack's captors were making for the remotest oasis in their territory, and with each day's travel the chances of escape grew fainter. To make a dash of fifty miles or so to the coast was comparatively easy. But to travel back across such wide spaces of trackless desert needed a training and preparation not to be soon or easily got; and Jack realised that the problem of escape had taken quite new dimensions.

A weaker man might have abandoned hope; but as he lay on the sand in the dark, with the slumbering Bedouins about him, Jack studied the new conditions coolly. His natural courage was great, and somehow the thought of Denise gave it an edge of steel. He *must* get back to her! It filled him with a sort of scornful anger to think that a score of ragged and untaught Arabs should keep them separated.

He studied keenly the personnel of the band. He resolved to master their language and their methods of life. He would learn the secret of their endurance and their skill in desert-travel. Why should not the hieroglyphics of the desert landscape become as legible to him as to them? His brain, strong in the resources of civilisation, should pluck from theirs all the knowledge they held. Pride of race and civilisation stirred in him. His senses were as keen as theirs. He had a knowledge they did not possess. Why should not a civilised man outsee, outmarch, and outlast a savage?

Then his courage found a better root than even

pride of race and civilisation. Did his Christian faith count for nothing? It surely put him in touch with nobler forces than any of which these untaught Bedouins had any experience. As he reflected he saw that it was a peril great and deadly that he might lose the moral qualities which parted him from these children of the desert, and sink to the morals as well as the offices of the slave. In the last analysis it was a spiritual interval which separated him from his captors, and in self-defence he must keep that interval as wide as possible.

He was in a strait betwixt two. He must show himself better than these Bedouins or become worse, and either by measureless degrees. So he clung to his religion with a new energy—the energy with which a drowning sailor in a wild sea clings to a lifebuoy. And what was his religion? He had no Bible but what stole out, in half-forgotten fragments, from the cells of his memory. How he longed for the little ragged Testament made sacred by the touch of a dead mother's hand! But Denise had it; and somehow, as he thought of it, that Testament which had passed from his hand to hers became a new link betwixt them.

It was odd what parts of the Bible he remembered and what he forgot. But what he forgot only threw into bolder and loftier relief the passages he remembered. The Bible for him, under these conditions, resembled a landscape seen through mists. Only the loftier peaks were visible. And what were these?

The one great luminous fact which that half-forgotten Bible yielded was the figure of a personal God; God not an abstraction, a Force, a stream of tendency; God as a father having personal relations

with His child; God revealed in Christ and interpreted by Christ. Fragments of verses, sweet as the strain of the half-forgotten songs of childhood, awoke in Jack's memory. Bible stories too—the stories he learned as a child at his mother's knee—somehow emerged, and clothed themselves with strange meanings. Poor Lawrence found hidden messages in them. The tale of the Hebrew children unscorched in the fiery furnace—what a childish story! But did it not make visible at one point a fact which held good everywhere and always, the fact of a divine companionship with men in trouble? If so, then, was not some unseen Son and Brother of man beside him in the white furnace of the desert? So Jack got what many in happy conditions never get—a personal and verified Bible.

His religion, it may be added, fulfilled one other office which many miss in it. It gave him the constant sense of companionship. God was with him, filling all loneliness with the sense of a divine Presence. This Presence, too, was shared by those he loved and by all the saints. It became the one link betwixt himself and Denise, and it still held good when all others failed. All the dreadful emptiness of space parted them. She was beyond the reach of his senses. No touch of hand, no meeting of eyes was possible. But here was one realm at least in which they met—a realm in which he was free and had kinship with unknown orders.

Great is the power of faith! This lonely slave in an Arab camp, lost in the solitudes of the desert, stretched his arms with exultation as he felt himself in kinship with the heroic spirits of all lands and ages.

At the back of his courage there was, it has to be confessed, one pagan element. He looked at his situation with unshrinking eyes, and realised that the worst that could come to him was death. He could die, as brave men did in battle, and not count it an evil beyond endurance. And when he had measured in this way the worst possibilities of his lot he felt almost light-hearted. Nay, he felt transfigured. The black fact of death was a door, not *out* of life but *into* life.

Jack mastered the language quickly, for he heard no other sound than it. He found what may be called the arts of Bedouin life few and not difficult to acquire. His theory that the civilised man, with the strength of a trained brain, can beat the savage in his own arts if driven to practise them was justified by the facts. He quickly learned to interpret the desert as well as the Bedouins who were born in its melancholy depths. He could bear heat and thirst and hunger as bravely as they. He grew as tireless, as quick-sighted, as patient of toil.

He taught the children of the little camp new games and told them new stories; and, as children of all lands are very much the same, he quickly won their hearts. The blacks became docile to him. In brief, race told, knowledge told, courage of will told. But it was the moral qualities in the captive Englishman which told most of all. He acted on some better law than the rest of the camp. He somehow carried with him stronger forces. So this slave became a power in the camp.

One happy incident enabled Jack to win an influence over the old sheikh which probably saved him

from some of the worst experiences of a slave's life. The sheikh, with another Bedouin, started to visit a friendly camp some three days' journey distant, and took Lawrence with him to attend to the camels. Midway on the return, the two Arabs suddenly resolved to visit a long-deserted oasis nearly one hundred miles off their route.

They reached the oasis towards the evening of the third day. It was a little sunken valley, with rocky cliffs on three sides, and a track leading down over loose stones on the fourth. As they descended, a stone on which the sheikh's camel trod slipped under its feet, and the beast fell clumsily, throwing its rider and rolling on him. The sheikh lay unconscious as Jack and Hamed bent over him. There was a deep cut in his head, one ankle was twisted, he was crushed about the chest. The camel refused to rise; but they lifted the unconscious man, carried him to the shade of the rocks, and with rough surgery bound up his wounds.

Hamed presently went off to examine the little valley, and came back just as the sun was setting. Jack could see that his face was gloomy. He examined the sheikh, who had recovered consciousness during his absence, but was now lying in a stupor of sleep. The Bedouin squatted on the sand, lit his pipe, and smoked for an hour in silence. Then he arose and went off to examine the injured camel, still lying where it had fallen. He came back and stood, the light of the fire playing on his dark face.

"Allah wills it," he said, "the sheikh cannot ride. I will go off and fetch help."

He was busy for a while with his camel, then he

came back to where the sheikh was lying, and took up the water-bag and proceeded to take it away. Some impulse made Jack jump to his feet.

"You must not take that," he said, "the sheikh may want it. You have your own."

Hamed dropped the bag, snatched a knife from his belt, and turned on Jack with a threatening gesture. But something in the steady look and fearless attitude of the white slave checked him. For a moment, in the light of the fire, the two men looked at each other with threatening eyes; but the stronger spirit of the white man overbore the Bedouin, and with a guttural curse he turned and walked off; and through the dark Jack heard the clatter of his camel's hoofs on the stones. In the morning the sheikh had recovered all his senses, and looked round with questioning eyes at his companion.

"Hamed is gone," Jack explained. "Your camel is crippled, you cannot ride, and he is gone to fetch help."

The sheikh's face darkened. "He has abandoned us," he said. "He will never return."

Hamed did not belong by blood to the tribe. He had fled from his own clan to escape punishment for some offence, and had been allowed to remain at El Kabla. But the sheikh knew his man, and knew he was faithless. Then Jack told how Hamed had tried to carry off the water-bag of the sheikh.

"Has he taken the other?" the sheikh asked.

Jack went over to the place where the trappings of his own camel were piled, but the water-bag had disappeared. The sheikh showed no surprise at the news.

"But are there not wells here?"

The sheikh shook his head doubtfully.

"The fresh wells here failed. The one that remains is salt. That is why the place was abandoned."

Jack set off to examine the wells. Three were dry, and had evidently been dry for years. He discovered a fourth, close to the foot of the cliff, but on tasting the water in it found it bitter with salt. Some saline deposit in the strata through which the water trickled made it as undrinkable as sea-water.

As Jack stood by it, with the taste of the bitter fluid on his lips, he realised the whole situation. Here were two men, one of them crippled, in the heart of the scorched desert, at least three days' journey from help, with one poor skin of water for them both. The sheikh was helpless. Why should he not mount his camel and make a dash for freedom? He would at least have a chance of escape, while to stop was to perish. He came back to the sheikh, and told him what he had found. The sheikh looked at him with suspicion.

"You will leave me," he whispered at last, "like Hamed."

"No," said Jack.

"Why should you not?" said the sheikh sullenly. "It is fate."

"Hamed may come back yet," Jack argued; but in the look in the sheikh's eyes was a sufficient answer.

Jack stood thinking over the situation. To stay was to die. His camel was poor, but at least it gave him a chance. Then he looked at the sheikh. To

leave a crippled man to perish with thirst was to a man of Jack's race and faith impossible.

"I shall stop," he said, "and take my chance. I will not leave you."

The sheikh looked at him long and with doubting eyes; but Jack had dismissed the question, and busied himself with examining the sheikh's injuries. The dislocated ankle had been tightly bandaged, but it was plain some of the injured man's ribs had been broken, and Jack wound a bandage tightly round his body. He knew how quickly the Bedouin recovered from what seemed almost fatal injuries. The sheikh would, no doubt, recover from his wounds, but it would only be to die from thirst.

In the morning Jack mixed a little barley-meal and water for the sheikh, but did little more than wet his own lips. Help might come, and the scanty store of water must be made to last as long as possible. The sheikh watched suspiciously as Jack poured out the precious fluid from the water-bag. He noted the scanty portion the white man took for himself, and understood with the quickness of a son of the desert his slave's purpose. From that moment he seemed to dismiss his suspicions.

Meanwhile, Jack walked back to the salt well and looked at the cool water as it lay in the shade of the rock. It was death hidden under the mask of life. Was there no art by which he could rob the water of its deadly saltness? The sheikh, wise in the lore of the desert, was helpless; but a civilised brain ought to be able to solve the problem. Jack stood long, recalling all he had heard of the devices of shipwrecked sailors or lost travellers, as well as all that his knowledge of science could teach him.

At last he turned back to the sheikh. Something in his bearing spoke of hope, and the Arab looked at him with questioning eyes.

"Yes," said Jack, "I think I can make that bitter water sweet."

He took the sheikh's long gun, broke it loose from its wooden stock, and examined it. It was an iron tube nearly four feet six inches long. He then took from the sheikh's saddle a small iron kettle. It was a bit of plunder from the French camp, which the sheikh valued and took with him on his journeys not so much for its utility as for its strangeness and to exhibit in other camps as a trophy. Jack tore a strip of goat's skin from the saddle, and soaked it in the salt well to make it flexible. He placed one end of the gun-barrel against the spout of the kettle, and wound the goat's skin round the junction of the two again and again, lashing it tightly. It formed a flexible joint betwixt the kettle and the gun-barrel. He filled the kettle with salt water, "jammed" on the lid tightly with damp cloth, placed the kettle on the fire, with the gun-barrel resting on stones and stretched out like an enormous spout with a slight downward inclination.

Presently the kettle boiled, and the steam found its way down the long barrel. Jack had wound strips of blanket round the barrel, and he kept them cool with water. As he expected, the steam passing through the long, cool barrel condensed, and presently a bead of water formed at the end of the barrel. It dropped into the bowl that Jack had placed there. Other drops followed; they grew at last into a tiny thread of water. It tasted of gun-powder, it was warm and insipid, but at least it was drinkable. And as long as he could find

fuel Jack knew in this way he could keep up the supply of water.

The sheikh had watched the whole process with uncomprehending eyes; but when towards midnight Jack brought him the little bowl half full of the tricklings from the gun-barrel he understood, and his look repaid Jack.

Ten days afterwards Jack and the sheikh crept into El Kabla. The sheikh had sufficiently recovered to be able to ride, and Jack brought both the crippled man and camel safely back. Their long absence had excited wonder, but no one thought of going in search of the missing party. The sheikh told at the camp-fire the story, and many guttural expletives were expended on the missing Hamed. No particular gratitude was shown to the white slave by the camp at large, the sheikh himself spoke no word of thanks. The Bedouins are not a voluble race; but from that time he silently protected his English captive from humiliations and injuries which might well have proved intolerable.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE ESCAPE

JACK guessed that El Kabla must be in the heart of what is known as the great Nubian Desert, and almost as far south as the twentieth degree of latitude. Due north, under certain conditions of the atmosphere, could be seen faintly the summits of a mountain range. He picked up from the gossip of the camp every hint as to the desert geography he could, and decided that these mountains were the extremity of the range that is thrust forward like a spear from what is known as the Great Cataract, midway into the melancholy waste that stretches from the Nile to the Red Sea. He knew that the Nile lay far to the west, the Red Sea to the east.

For him, then, the way of escape ran northward, and by preference to the east of the central range. If he went to the west of it he would be travelling inward towards the Nile, and must strike a belt of populated country in which it would be almost impossible to escape detection. To the east of the range lay, it was true, a vast stretch of desert solitudes; to plunge into its empty landscapes was in the highest degree perilous, yet some instinct made him turn his face eastward.

The sea lay there. There were French garrisons along the coast and British ships upon the waters. The very thought, indeed, of the restless sea, with its leaping waves and blowing winds, filled him with longing.

The tribe lived chiefly by plunder, making forays on the caravan-tracks east and west; but Jack knew he must postpone his dash for freedom until they made some bold foray to the north. Every mile in that direction was for him a mile nearer safety. But the months went by, and no band from the oasis turned the heads of their camels northward.

And meanwhile Jack's position amongst the Bedouins became more difficult. He knew that the sheikh, in his grim and taciturn fashion, was the one friend he possessed; he stood silently betwixt "El Nazarin"—as he was called—and the cruelties practised on the other slaves. But he was growing feeble, his power over the fiercer spirits of the tribe grew less every day. His son Hassan was of a brutal temper, with an evil fire of fanaticism running through his brutality, and Jack felt that he hated him because he was a Christian. So for the unfortunate "El Nazarin" the interval betwixt escape and death was swiftly narrowing.

There had been noisy debates amongst the Bedouins on some proposal for a more daring foray than usual, and at last it became clear that some great adventure was resolved upon. Camels were carefully examined, saddles repaired, arms cleaned, stores of food and water prepared. A raid, it was at last announced, was to be made on the caravan-track leading to Wady Halfa; and with a leap in his blood Jack realised that this

meant a bold ride of many days through waterless country to the north. The moment for making his dash for freedom was near.

Early one morning the party rode out. It numbered some forty, including half a dozen slaves; and Jack was delighted to see that Sidi was one of the party. The sheikh was too old to accompany them on an adventure which would tax the endurance of the warriors of the clan to the utmost. Hassan acted as leader. This, Jack knew, was for him an unhappy circumstance. There was a disquieting malignity in the Bedouin's eyes as they fell upon him. "El Nazarin" need expect scant mercy if he gave any occasion for cruelty. Even if he gave none, the cruelty was sure to come; and the look on Hassan's gloomy face hardened Jack's resolve to seize the earliest moment for breaking away from the band. But still he waited with resolute patience; each day's journey northward, he believed, improved his chances.

The band pressed on with speed in spite of almost intolerable heat, for the stretch of waterless country to be crossed was wide, and the temper of even the Bedouins grew more cruel under the strain of travelling. A scanty measure of water was served out twice a day to each member of the party; but the slaves had a smaller allowance than even their masters, while Hassan seemed to delight in giving to "El Nazarin" only enough to tantalise him and to leave thirst parching his tongue and burning like a fever in his blood.

On the seventh day the heat was intense. It seemed as if the very air would take fire. About noon a faint wind from the south began to stir. It filled the

atmosphere with particles of dust which stung as though they were white-hot flakes streaming from the mouth of a furnace. The sky grew dark with a purple haze. Jack looked round for a moment on the band through the dust-filled air. The Arabs were plodding on, their *haiks* thrown over their faces. They were hardly visible in the eddies of strangling dust.

The wind rose fast. In less than an hour it was screaming above them like a hurricane. The lighter dust was blown away, and so it was possible to see some little distance; and through the eddies of dust-filled air could be seen, on an amazing scale, the most terrific phenomenon of the desert—the sirocco. The furious wind seemed to tear from the ground vast masses of sand, whirl them into cylindrical shape, and drive them gyrating at speed across the landscape. Jack counted no less than twenty of these huge pillars of sand in movement at once. Some were travelling with the speed of a galloping horse across the floor of sand, their summits torn into streaming fragments. Others moved with a majestic slowness, their tops rising almost beyond the reach of eyesight. The procession of giants came and went as though in the convolutions of some Titanic dance.

At the spectacle, the band had suddenly dismounted. Many flung themselves down, thrusting their very faces into the sand, others crouched with their *haiks* thrown over their heads. The camels squatted, stretching their long necks as close to the ground as possible. The slaves were left to their own devices. Jack, like the rest, had flung himself on the ground; for to stand upright was impossible. But though the wind-driven sand pricked his face as if with flying



needles he could not take his eyes from the monstrous tangle of spinning sand-pillars hung betwixt the storm-vexed heavens and earth.

Presently Jack realised that this strange dance of whirling columns was drawing to a centre, and the meeting-point threatened to be on the very spot where the band lay crouched. He saw two of the vast reeling pillars crash together and fall, and a sudden hill of sand marked the spot where they tumbled. Every now and again a sort of cataract of sand would fall upon the party, flung from the flank of some rushing column, and the half-strangled men would fight their way out of the living grave with difficulty. If one of these great masses broke upon the party Jack knew that they would be blotted out of existence in a moment.

At last, through the haze of eddying dust, he saw one great column moving with majestic slowness, its top almost rising beyond the reach of sight, straight upon them. It seemed to tear up the surface of the ground as it came on. The vast mass of sand which composed it was in a state of wildest agitation. It was a sort of vertical whirlpool of sand-particles running up into the sky.

As Jack watched its oncoming he felt sure this was the end of everything for him. But when still a couple of hundred yards distant it curved in slow and stately fashion to the right, and then went past in a thundering roar, flinging upon them as it went a spray of sand that in a moment buried the entire party.

Jack was crouched beside his camel, and found a sort of shelter behind its hairy back. He lay passive till the rain of hissing sand above him had ceased, and

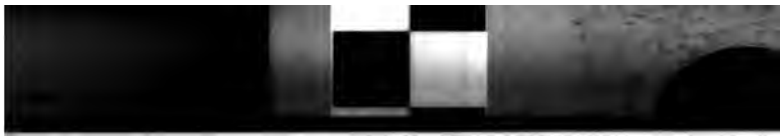
then at last, and almost with the sensations of a dying man, struggled out. The dance of cloud-pillars had swept away. The wind had fallen. The air was still dark with suspended dust-particles. Jack cleared his throat of the strangling sand with difficulty, and drew a deep mouthful of air; but the fiery atmosphere seemed to scorch his very lungs. He dragged out his water-bag and drank a mouthful of the tepid fluid.

The full weight of the column had not fallen on the party, but the spray of flying dust had been piled over them till they were buried. An irregular cluster of mounds marked the position of some of the camels; beyond them the piled sand rose to a great hillock.

Jack set to work frantically on the mound nearest to him, beneath which he knew Sidi lay. He dragged him out presently, his black face swollen in the agonies of suffocation. He poured betwixt the thick lips a little water, and the negro presently recovered, coughing violently to clear his throat of sand. For an hour the two toiled to rescue the other members of the band.

Hassan was one of the first dragged out. He was nearly dead. Sidi shook his fist exultantly over the Arab's distorted features; but Jack thrust the negro aside and poured a little water down the choked throat of his tormentor, and left him to gather strength while he laboured to rescue others. Hassan's long gun lay beside him, and before he left him Jack slipped the flint from the lock. He could not trust the Bedouin's gratitude, even though he had saved his life.

Some of the Arabs dragged from beneath the sand were dead; and, in addition, nearly one-half of the party lay buried beneath the gigantic hillock beyond



all hope of rescue. The huge mass of tumbled sand was their grave. Some fifteen or sixteen camels had struggled to their feet, and were standing moaning, still in terror and distress.

Out of a band of forty, only fourteen had escaped, and some of these were still insensible. Jack realised that the moment for his escape had come. It had come in a tragical fashion, it was true; but perhaps it was all the more favourable on that account. He beckoned Sidi to him.

"I shall take my chance," he said to the negro, "and escape."

The negro nodded comprehendingly and energetically, and declared he would go too. Jack looked at him steadily for a moment.

"Yes," he said, "you shall come if you will; but it is life or death for us."

Sidi grinned cheerfully in reply, and the two set to work at once to prepare for their flight. The rescued Arabs were too stupefied to interfere with them. Jack chose the two best of the surviving camels. One was what is known as a *heirie;* the compact frame, the symmetrical limbs, the finer hair were all signs of breed. A *heirie* of an inferior kind, known as a *talayeh*, was chosen for Sidi. No camel in the party, Jack knew, could overtake either of those he had chosen. Some bags of dates were seized, the best of the water-bags, two long-barrelled guns with ammunition. Sidi had chosen a couple of spears and two formidable knives, and in a few minutes Jack felt he was equipped for escape.

Hassan was still leaning against a hillock of sand when Jack walked up to him.

"I am leaving you camels and food enough," he said; "but we part here."

The Bedouin stared fiercely at him without reply, but while Jack was speaking his brown hand stole out and grasped his long gun. His fingers ran over the lock, but the flint was gone.

"You are helpless, Hassan," said Jack, who had quietly watched the process. "If 'El Nazarin' were a Bedouin you would be lying *there* still," and he pointed sternly to the piled sand.

Sidi, who stood by him, laughed derisively at the Bedouin, and stooped over him as through to strike him. He had unnumbered cruelties to repay, but Jack plucked him roughly back.

"The man is helpless. Do not strike him."

He turned, mounted his camel, and rode off, Hassan staring after him in fierce silence. Jack wasted no regrets over the Bedouins lying strangled beneath that hill of hot sand. Perhaps he had himself caught a touch of Bedouin pitilessness. The world, he believed, would be sweeter and happier without them.

As he rode away a rush of gladness swept through his very blood. He never dreamed of an escape like this. He was mounted, armed, equipped, with a loyal comrade by his side, and he turned and looked gratefully at Sidi's huge form. He knew they need fear no pursuit. Hassan would creep back slowly to the oasis, and when he reached it he could organise no band to follow them. Whatever perils lay in front of them there were none behind. A sense of freedom swept through him like an intoxication. He threw up his arms with a shout. Sidi laughed.

"We may die, Sidi," he cried, "but we shall never be slaves again."

"I am your slave," said Sidi.

"No, you are my comrade."

Then followed many days of steady travelling—days crowded with perils, scorched with heat, sore with fatigue, but yet days illumined with hope. For, as they travelled, the black shadows of slavery grew ever fainter behind them. There was enough in the experience through which they passed to tax the utmost fortitude they possessed. No matter with what energy they pushed on over the arid and measureless plain they seemed to make little progress. It was as though they were mere insects imprisoned in some great swinging circle of sun-scorched hills.

The sickle-like horizon was almost as clear as that of the sea. The sun broke over the curving rim to the east, climbed to the flaming zenith, and sank in another flame of colour over the westward rim; and under the arched fire of that terrible sky they travelled like men in a dreadful nightmare, it almost seemed, without making progress. The mountain peaks on the left hand kept their place unchanged day after day.

And yet, as they travelled, Jack felt his heart grow lighter with every stroke of his camel's legs. The sea was still far off, but something of its freshness stole into his blood. A weight seemed lifted off his imagination. He looked about him with a new vision. He began to realise what may be called the fierce beauty of the desert—the splendours of sunrise and of sunset, the long day, with the soft,

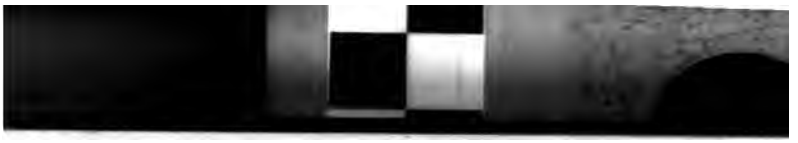
insistent pad of the camels' hoofs running through the hours like a thread of music.

The wheeling shadows marked the flight of the hours. At daybreak they stretched far to the left, at noon they swung foreshortened under their very feet, as the sun went down they crept far out to the right.

Again and again they saw the wonder of the mirage. In the still heat the landscape seemed to undulate, the stones to move and flicker. Then out of the wavering plain broke the vision of lakes reed-fringed and bird-haunted, stretches of clear water in which the clouds were mirrored. And the two fugitives rode on, staring like men bewitched on this aerial picture of cool waters painted on the hot floor of the desert.

Sometimes fierce winds rose and beat on them, and Jack realised that the sea of the desert has its waves as truly as the ocean itself. For the driving wind would pile up tiny hills of running sand, then level them again, as if in sport, till the whole plain seemed to rise and sink in restless, running crests of brown spray.

The days were sharply edged with danger. Sometimes they had to creep past a Bedouin village in the dark. Sometimes, pressed by thirst, they rode boldly into an Arab encampment. Dismounting, they would stand till the sheikh came out, and exclamations of *salaam* and *aleikoum* were interchanged—the greeting of the desert. Jack kissed the dirty *haik* of the sheikh or his equally dirty hand. He could talk the vernacular of the desert as readily as he once talked the *argot* of the Paris



slums, and he would tell some tale how they belonged to a remote tribe raided and almost destroyed by some hostile clan.

Sidi's dark face usually served as a guarantee of genuineness to the pair; but the desert is full of suspicion, and again and again they narrowly escaped detection.

Once they had to maintain a running fight for a couple of days, and only the speed of their camels and Jack's good shooting saved them. But onward still they rode. The space they had to cross seemed measureless. A mountain peak to the west kept march with them for days, till it seemed as if they would never drop it. At night the Southern Cross kept its place unchanged in the purple heavens until Jack thought it would never dip towards the horizon. But still onward, with unfailing courage, the pair pressed. Freedom beckoned them, and Hope.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE UNKNOWN DEAD

SOME six weeks after the sirocco which destroyed Hassan and his band, Jack and Sidi were picking their way through a belt of rocky country, a tangle of wild ravines. They were nearing, Jack believed, the upper coast of the Red Sea. The day had been one of intense heat. The sun's rays were flung back on them from the cliffs on either side until the pair felt like a couple of ants under a burning-glass. The ravine rose sharply, and their camels grunted and moaned with distress as they climbed. They reached the crest at last; and, in spite of the torment of the heat, Jack as he looked round felt afresh the beauty of a desert sunset.

The mountain peaks above them were crimson, the steep rocks on either hand were red. The sunset poured, a stream of flaming colour, through the ravine and splashed the tumbled rocks that strewed it with tints of blood. All the west was a flame of glory. Great bars of light, like thrusting spears flaming and broken, ran from the horizon to the zenith. Jack stopped his camel involuntarily to stare at the sight, but Sidi rode a few paces ahead,

his figure showing in hard, black silhouette against the sunset.

Presently Jack noticed that he was staring down from the crest with great eagerness. He suddenly threw up his hands, as if in wonder. He plainly saw something of an unusual sort, and Jack pushed his camel forward to see. Beneath their feet was a shallow, saucer-like little valley, a floor of sand, with the black, sun-baked rocks for imprisoning rim; and strewed on the sand Jack saw with astonishment half a dozen bodies. They were not sleeping, the rigid attitudes told they were dead. They were not Arabs. To Jack's wondering eyes they seemed to wear a sort of European uniform.

He pushed his camel down the slope and stopped by the first of the prostrate figures. The man was dead, killed, as a glance showed, not by gunshot or spear-thrust but by thirst or heat. The face was dry as that of a mummy, and the tight-drawn, semi-transparent skin sharpened every feature. The lips were drawn back into a dreadful grin, the eyebrows were lifted as though with a look of astonishment. But what awoke in Jack a sense of bewildered amazement was the dress of the dead man.

It was that of an English marine, with belt and side-arm and cartridge-box. Jack went with ever-growing wonder from one body to another. There were seven in all, and one was plainly that of a petty officer. The body was in a sitting attitude, propped against the rock. Under the cap was a bullet-wound.

Jack sat down on a rock to stare at the sight in wordless astonishment. He could scarcely credit his

senses. To stumble in the desert on the dead bodies of a group of British marines! Where did they come from? Had they fallen out of the sky or been flung ashore from some wreck?

No, it was plain they were not a wrecked party. The condition of their arms and dress proved this. They were not the fugitives from some defeat, for they bore no mark of battle or pursuit upon them. Jack remembered that the body leaning against the rock had a bullet-hole in the forehead. He walked up to it again. The pistol lay beside the dead man's hand. The wound had been self-inflicted. The man had shot himself in despair, perhaps, after seeing the rest of his party perish.

Some few hundred yards ahead, where the little ravine curved round the point of rock, another body was lying. It was that of a tall and powerful man. He was completely naked. The man's musket and some of his clothes were scattered in a line betwixt his corpse and the rest of the party.

Jack began to decipher the meaning of these dreadful hieroglyphics. The unhappy wretch was stronger than the other members of the party, and had outlived them by a little space. He had gone mad with thirst, and with an impulse common in such cases had stripped himself naked. Then he had run or staggered on till he fell.

The whole story by degrees became intelligible. The party plainly belonged to some British man-of-war. A landing had been made on the coast, and this little party had been detached for some special service. They had lost themselves, and the fierce heat of the desert had destroyed them. The dry skin on the dry bones told the whole tale.

In after days Jack learned that this was exactly what had happened. In August, 1799, two British frigates, the *Dædalus* and the *Fox*, made a dash at Kosseir, then held by the French. They cut out some dhows in the port, breached the walls of the fort itself, but failed to carry the place. Some boat-parties were sent ashore; they landed south of the town for the purpose of destroying the wells from which the town was supplied with water, and the marines belonging to one boat had got separated from their comrades and perished. These were the men whose bodies Lawrence found lying as we have described.

The light had faded in the west by this time, the whole sky had changed into a colour of faintest emerald. Here and there the white flames of the greater stars were visible, and with the coming night a weight of measureless and awful silence seemed to fall upon the little valley. The silent hills crouched under the silent skies. Noon and midnight in the desert are both marked by a strange and listening silence; but as Jack sat with that strange company of the nameless and forgotten dead about him the stillness of the night seemed to take a yet more awful aspect.

Little had he dreamed that when, after years of slavery, he should meet his countrymen it would be in that strange form. What dark tragedies the desert held! The dead lying about him were of his own race, the sons of English villages. And from the lush meadows, the running streams, the tangled hedges, the cool skies, the blowing winds of their native land, they had found their way to this lonely spot to die under the fierce African sun. As Jack sat and meditated the Southern Cross had risen, a slanting quaternion of stars,

sign of the alien skies under which the dead were lying.

Presently his thoughts took a more practical turn. It was clear the dead men came from a vessel of war. They plainly had not travelled far, for they had no camels or supply of stores. This showed that the sea was near, and a port visited sometimes by vessels of war. It was many months since they landed, but there might be one there even now; and Jack's blood tingled with expectation at the thought. In the morning they would turn the heads of their camels to the east.

He could do nothing for the dead bodies about him. Their side-arms on the short and clumsy muskets were of no use to him. Their dress was absurdly unsuited to the climate. He would have buried them, but he had no spade for the task. The fierce African sun that had slain them must be their keeper. But Jack thought with a pang that perhaps more than one woman's heart in far-off England was torn with unforgetting grief for those who lay about him.

Sidi crouched in the sand near him. The dead bodies about him shook his nerves with fear—not that they were dead, but that they were the dead of another race, wearing a strange dress, and flung here by some strange fate. He began a negro lament, and the cadence of the wild, lamenting notes seemed to deepen inexpressibly the melancholy that filled the night and brooded over the silent dead.

CHAPTER XXXVII

WHAT THE TWO MEN SAW

THE next morning, while the stars yet hung in the sky, the pair mounted and rode out of the ravine, halting for a moment as they reached the summit of the pass to look back. The shadow of the night still lay on the little valley, and still in unchanged attitude on the floor of sand slept the dead. With a wordless salute, a gesture of compassionate farewell, Jack wheeled his camel and rode away.

Their course lay to the east, though again and again they were thrust out of that track by lines of cliffs and the stony shoulders of the great hills. For hours they rode, Jack with a thrill of expectation scanning from each hill-top in turn as they reached it the eastern skyline in search of the sea. But there was only the unchanged landscape of the desert—a floor of sand, an horizon pricked with outlines of far-off purple hills.

At last, looking steadily betwixt two hills that stood apart, showing a clear segment of the horizon, he caught a streak of paler but steadier purple, and shouted in the fashion already described, *Thalatta! thalatta!* He was like stout Cortez when, standing silent upon a peak in Darien, he saw the Pacific. He

stared with wild eyes at that band of far-off purple. Beyond it was England, with all that England held.

Sidi, however, had ceased to look eastward. That haze of colour was too remote to impress his limited imagination. He was staring at the nearer landscape. Something had caught his attention. They were in movement again by this time, but Sidi rode with head turned now in one direction now in another like a man who is listening. At last he stopped his camel abruptly.

"What is it, Sidi?"

The big ears of the negro were literally twitching with the strain of their owner's listening. His eyeballs were almost starting out of his head.

"Listen!" he cried, and he looked wildly round in the air. Jack stopped and bent his head. He was presently conscious of some strange murmur of sound that seemed to come from the upper chambers of the air. But it died away; and after listening for a few moments Jack, with an impatient gesture, put his camel in motion again. A sound as of a vast crowd heard in the lonely desert must be a trick of the senses.

Still Sidi rode with that strange attitude of intense listening. Presently he stopped again, and Jack drew up his camel too. Both men listened. Yes, there was a sound about them as of a moving multitude, the tread of many feet, the creak of wagons, the hum of voices. The sound came in rhythmical beats as though from the feet of an army on the march.

It was vague, far-off, a mere thrill in the air; but it certainly was there. Was the desert enchanted? Last night the sight of the unknown dead on the sand,

to-day the sound of the unknown living in the air! While the two men listened and stared about them, with a thrill of half-superstitious dread creeping through their blood, there came faintly a sharper sound as of metal. It was the ring of steel.

The ground fell sharply before them in a long, dry, curving ravine, like the empty and sun-scorched bed of some African Mississippi through which for thousands of years a great river had run, and now ran no more. As the two men neared the edge, that strange, soft tumult of sound that a few minutes before seemed to fall upon them from the upper chambers of the air now rose from beneath their feet. They stood at last on the edge of the ravine, and looked down.

A great column of men was moving beneath them. Their weapons, the orderly rhythm of their tread, told that they were soldiers. Here *was* an army on the march! For one bewildered moment Jack thought it was a mirage that cheated his senses. How had the lonely hills suddenly become peopled with an armed multitude in this fashion? But there was nothing of the uncertainty of a mirage in the scene. All the characteristics of a modern army in full march were reproduced in the scene in the valley below them. There was the solid column of linked battalions, the officers riding on their flanks, the camels, the guns, the ammunition-wagons.

But it was an army of silence. No sound of pipe nor beat of drum rose in the air. Even in the bewilderment of that sudden vision Jack noted the absence of military pomp and pride in it. The march was not merely as slow as that of a funeral, it was almost as melancholy. Men and horses alike moved

with drooping heads and an aspect of weariness. The very camels shambled with stumbling feet and downheld necks.

By what miracle had an army been dropped suddenly into the hot solitudes of the desert in this fashion? Was it a defeated force fleeing from some overwhelming disaster? But the ordered ranks showed no sign of defeat, and the slow march was plainly not pricked by fear.

Presently another astonishment fell upon Lawrence. What he saw was a British force—the uniforms, the build, and the look of the men made this certain. But just then solid and far-stretching battalions of men with dark faces came round the shoulder of the hill. Regiment after regiment went by, and still the stream of dusky visages showed no signs of exhaustion. Whence came this army of white faces and black?

Sidi pointed at the scene and chattered and gesticulated with the utmost excitement, but Jack was frozen dumb by mere wonder. How did a British force with guns and ammunition-wagons come to be marching in this fashion through a waterless desert in a savage land? Towards what battlefield were they pressing? In the tumult of astonishment which possessed him clear thought was impossible, and yet Jack found a clue to the problem in the battalions of dark faces marching beneath him.

They plainly came from India. They must have landed on some part of the coast of the Red Sea, for no other waters lay to the east. Marching westward, it was equally plain they were striking inland towards the Nile. An Indian army marching from the Red Sea to the Nile! There must be some great expedition that took in both India and England on foot.

But Jack stopped no longer to speculate. He put his camel in motion and plunged down the stony slope of the ravine. Presently the sound of rolling stones attracted attention below. An officer looked up. He saw two Arabs coming with almost reckless speed down the side of the hill towards them. A word of command ran along the column. It halted. The men began to handle their arms. Two or three officers put up their glasses and examined the approaching figures. A mounted officer came cantering from the head of the battalion to see what had happened.

Jack came on at breathless speed, but found himself unable to speak for mere wonder and joy. British faces and uniforms were before him! An officer had stepped out to meet him, followed by a sergeant and a file of men, while other officers were searching the crest of the ravine with their glasses. Had these Arabs any followers? For the officer waiting to meet Jack saw before him only an Arab, lean and brown, a long gun slung behind his shoulder, a white rag about his head, a huge negro riding behind him.

Jack showed no signs of pulling up his camel, so great was his gladness to find himself amongst friendly faces.

"Stop the beggar, sergeant," said the officer.

The sergeant put his musket across the nose of the camel. Jack looked at the face of the officer. It was freckled, burnt, dusty, with blue eyes beneath the scanty straw-coloured eyebrows. Not a striking or intellectual countenance; but Jack's heart seemed to leap into his throat as he saw it was the characteristic face of a countryman.

"I am English," he said briefly and with a broken voice.

"English, by Ged!" cried the officer, in astonished tones; "you don't look it."

The sergeant, with the file of men behind him, grinned. Here was an Arab of the Arabs claiming to be English! Jack saw the numeral "10" in their hats. It was the Tenth Regiment of the line.

"Who are you, my man?" asked the officer. "What are you doing here?"

"I am English," repeated Jack. "I have been a prisoner amongst the Arabs for years, and have made my escape."

A murmur of sympathy rose from the men.

"Were you wrecked on the coast?" asked the officer. "What is the name of your ship?"

Jack shook his head. "I do not belong to the navy."

"Are you in the service?" asked the officer eagerly. "What was your regiment?"

"No, I do not belong to the army. I was in the Foreign Office."

"The Foreign Office! Egad, they would not recognise you in Whitehall to-day."

Another officer meanwhile was questioning Sidi.

Jack had regained his self-command, and commenced to put eager questions. "Where have you dropped from, and who are you?" he said.

"Oh, we are Sir James Baird's force from India, on our way to the Nile. We are to join Sir Ralph Abercrombie's army in Lower Egypt."

Yes, Jack had stumbled on that most daring expedition in British history. The men at the head of affairs in England were civilians, but they planned on a large scale and showed some imagination in their

plans. They had sent Sir Ralph Abercrombie with fifteen thousand men to Alexandria, while Baird with eight thousand men was to cross the Indian Ocean, grope his way up the Red Sea, land if possible at Suez, and join hands with Abercrombie on the Nile.

Here was an expedition coming over almost unknown seas to uncharted ports, carrying an army which was to march across one hundred and thirty miles of waterless desert, drift down the Nile in boats, and join hands with another army sailing from English ports. Napoleon's "nation of shopkeepers" had set on foot an adventure more daring than any he himself had attempted.

Jack now understood the black faces in the army. He understood, too, the funereal melancholy and slowness of the march. Here were troops newly landed from crowded transports marching under the pitiless African sun, and suffering the torments of thirst and dust as they toiled across the weary miles of hot sand.

"You must tell your story when we camp," said the officer who had ridden from the head of the column. "We must get in movement again."

A brief word of command ran down the column, and with the rhythm of disciplined feet it was set in motion again; and like a man in a dream Jack rode beside the battalion of the Tenth.

Presently he dismounted. Sidi took charge of his camel, and he walked beside the friendly officer, picking up with eagerness all the news of the civilised world since he, trudging at the tail of the old sheikh's camel, had vanished from it. He heard the story of Napoleon's return to France, of his rise to power as First Consul, of the victories like a procession

of thunderclaps that had struck down Austria, the tale of Hohenlinden and of Marengo, the story of the fall of Pitt from power just to hand, as well as the news of Abercrombie's landing at Alexandria.

The officers of the Tenth plainly regarded all this as of less importance than the story of their adventures as an expedition, and these were sufficiently strange. Strong winds had scattered the fleet while crossing the Indian Ocean and coming up the Red Sea. The General had arrived at Kosseir to find the Admiral missing; the flagship had found its way, a solitary sail, to Suez. The transports came straggling in like broken-winged sea-birds, and were collected in the Bay of Kosseir. General Baird could get no news of what was happening in Lower Egypt. To march inland might mean the loss of the whole army. It seemed impossible to go forward and intolerable to go back.

At last the news had come of British success. Alexandria had been won, but Abercrombie was dead. General Hutchinson had assumed command in his place, and was marching on Cairo. Baird was now pushing his men across the desert betwixt Kosseir and Geneh, and thence to the Nile. When they reached the river they must sail or march down unknown hundreds of miles, and join hands with Hutchinson's men.

Jack listened like a man in a dream. Yesterday the desert solitudes lay about him, the world of his fellowmen seemed remote and almost unattainable. To-day he was riding beside a whole army; the great tale of the world was filling his ears—tidings of the fall of kingdoms and Cabinets, the clash of battling hosts. He was glad when night fell and the army

encamped. He flung himself down on the sand exhausted with the crowded events and strange emotions of the day.

Sidi, on his part, had less susceptibility to emotion than his English comrade. He had discovered some negro servants attached to the officers' mess, and sat laughing and chattering with them as though they had been his closest kinsmen.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

IN THE BRITISH CAMP

JACK was welcomed at the mess—such as it was—of the Tenth, and the change from a Bedouin camp-fire to the table of a British mess was bewildering. He sat amongst the officers of the Tenth like a man in a dream. Their talk sounded in his ears like an unknown language, he had lost the key to it. But the officers were on active duty, and, as is always the case under such conditions, were in high spirits, and their welcome to Jack had a delightful element of frankness in it. He had been rigged out in European dress at the expense of the wardrobes of half-a-dozen officers, and as he sat with his sunburnt features at the improvised mess-table he was a very striking figure. He had much to tell which keenly interested his hearers. He knew the desert through which they had to struggle, with its risks and hardships, its perils of thirst, of heat, of attack from roving bands; and he had a hundred stories of wild incidents and strange experiences to relate.

But the question of his own future was already perplexing him. The sight of English faces, the sound of English voices and laughter round the mess-table, seemed to bring his old life back to him at a breath.



The oasis set in the flaming sun, the dark countenances of the Bedouins, all the bitter memories of his slavery faded. He touched civilisation again. London was calling to him, and the faces London held. He stretched out his hand in the empty air involuntarily, as though to grasp unseen and far-off hands. What might not have happened in his own household circle during all those years? Did love still wait for him there? Did they mourn for him as dead?

Then there swept through him a wave of thankfulness that sent the water to his eyes. The suddenness and completeness of his escape amazed him. He had imagined himself reaching some little coastal village and seizing a boat and daring the risks of the sea, or stumbling perhaps on some French outpost and surrendering himself as a prisoner of war. He never imagined safety could be won except through some long procession of perils. And, lo! it had come in a breath, and in the shape of a whole British army, with its guns. Often when a slave in a camp of Bedouins, in the sleepless hours of the night or in the thirst and heat of a desert march, he had, in the language of the psalm, "lifted his eyes to the hills" from whence help alone could come. And help *had* come—complete, final.

The major, who sat at the head of the mess-table, noticed the mood of abstracted silence into which their guest fell; and when the little gathering broke up he detained him for a few minutes and talked of his future plans.

"You must see the General," he said at last; "he is coming up from the port to-night, and goes on to Legeta to-morrow. He will settle things for you."

The tone of confidence in which the major spoke amused Jack.

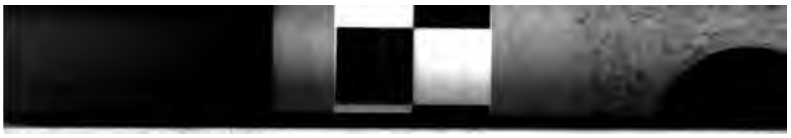
"The whole mess plainly believes in the General."

"So does every man in the camp. The Sepoys make religious offerings to him. Your shortest and safest road to London," the major went on, "is with us. We shall strike the Nile and sail down it, or march along its banks to Cairo, and join hands with the British troops there. You can easily make your way from that point down to the Mediterranean."

Jack did not reply, but he felt that this plan was hardly good enough. The pace of the army would be an irritation to him. The column crept on, with its huge "tail" of camels and supplies, the men halting through the flaming midday and the long afternoon. His camel would leave the heavy-footed battalions hopelessly behind. If there was no other course possible he must push on alone.

That night, as he lay half-asleep, Jack heard, running like a thread of sound through his dreams, the trampling of horses, the clash of steel; and when he awoke he was told that the General and his staff had arrived, and had pushed on, without halting, to the next stopping-place. Long before dawn, while the sky still glittered with the light of a thousand stars, the column had broken camp and was on the march. Jack rode for a couple of hours beside the major of the Tenth, and then put his camel to the trot and pushed on ahead with Sidi to Legeta, to overtake Baird. He reached the halting-place before noon, and early in the evening obtained an interview with Baird.

The British General was a figure to satisfy the eye of a soldier. In stature he overtopped every man in



his own force; and the vast limbs, the massive features, the full, open eyes—with a sort of slow majesty in them—made him an ideal soldier of the medieval type. He resembled an Ajax Telamon in the uniform of a British major-general. Whether he had the forecasting brain of a great soldier might perhaps be open to doubt. The forehead, falling in from the wide brows too quickly, hardly suggested intellect of the highest order. But if he had lived in an age when war was a matter of personal combat, Baird's commanding stature and physical strength would have made him famous. He might have ridden armed cap-à-pie, with Richard Lion-Heart; and there was a knightly strain in the Scotch soldier's temper as well as a knightly look on his face which made him fit for a place at the round table of King Arthur himself. After the guttural of Arab camps, too, Jack found his broad-vowelled Scottish speech—through which the consonants ran like a thread of gravel—very pleasant to his ears.

Baird listened to his story with silent attention. He pricked up his ears when Jack told the tale of his long slavery, and questioned him closely as to the life he had lived in the oasis and the term of his captivity.

"Well," he said, "I spent as long in an Indian dungeon," and he looked at Jack with a friendly air. He had himself been a captive for three years and eight months in Seringapatam, and the common experience gave him a sense of comradeship with his visitor. "Your Bedouins," Baird went on, "might have taken lessons in cruelty from Hyder Ali."

"But you had company, sir. I had no Lucas with me."

The story of Baird's long captivity was a household

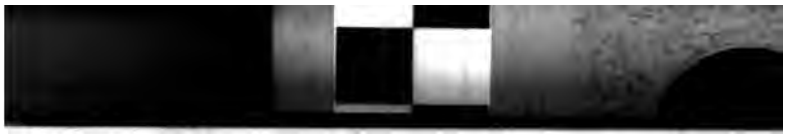
tale throughout Great Britain, and the chivalry of Lucas—a fellow-officer of Baird—was almost as famous and quite as noble as the story of Bayard and the dying soldier. His captors were about to fasten a pair of heavy iron fetters on Baird's wounded limbs, and Lucas volunteered to bear two sets of irons himself in order to save his comrade. Baird's eyes softened at the name.

"Ay," he said, "he died, poor fellow, in that devil's hole."

Baird meditated a few moments, after listening to Jack's story.

"I will give you all the help I can. You are eager to reach London, and the column will be too slow for you. But I am sending my aide-de-camp Budgeon in advance, with despatches to General Hutchinson. He must travel fast, but I don't think," he added, looking at Jack's active figure and sun-browned features, "that you will hinder him. You may, indeed, be a help to him, and the two of you shall ride together."

Budgeon was called in. He was a little, short-legged, short-necked, square-headed officer, an infantry man, having a commission in the Eighty-fourth. Baird had chosen his messenger with a shrewd eye, for Budgeon was a light-weight, a soldier every inch, and his little compact body was as hard as nails. He looked askance at Jack as soon as he heard they were to be companions. He meant to push on at speed and at any cost. This newly escaped slave was not a soldier; at best he would be an unknown factor in the enterprise in hand, and he might well be a drag upon it. But Budgeon took a fresh look at his proposed companion, and something in his build and look reassured him.



"You will do," he said briefly.

But Jack found that he must part with Sidi. Budgeon bluntly refused to have him in the party.

"You need not come yourself," he said ungraciously, "if you do not want to come; but we cannot take the negro with us."

There was no difficulty in finding a place for Sidi in the force; he was gladly taken on by the quartermaster of the Tenth. But is was hard to break a companionship cemented by so many perils and sufferings. Jack found it hard, indeed, to make Sidi understand why they must part, and the huge negro flung himself down on the sand, weeping like a child, when he heard the news. Jack felt his own eyes grow wet at the parting.

"I shall come back to Egypt," he said, "some day, and pick you up again;" and at the words Sidi lifted his face with a half-consoled look. Jack had arranged for an advance from the paymaster of the Tenth, and he poured into Sidi's broad black palm a glittering stream of gold. But the tears were running down the negro's face as Jack rode away, and the gold coins were slipping through his unheeding fingers.

The pair rode off from the camp as soon as night fell, and pushed on all night. The next day they struck the Nile at Ghennah. They had to find their way down more than three hundred miles of its course to Cairo. The river was already beginning to rise, the monsoon had set in, and if the current was in favour of the boat the wind was against it.

"The General," said Budgeon, as he looked meditatively on the river, and noted the lines of foam caused by the rush of the current against the wind,

"will have a hard job when he gets his troops afloat."

Ghennah was a little patch of verdure set in the brown of the desert sands, with the river running past one face of it. It was rich in fruit-trees, in gardens, and melon-beds, in leaf and shade of every kind; and to the eyes of Jack, dulled by the glare of the white light and the brown and gray of desert sands for so many months, the green of the little riverside oasis was a perpetual feast in colour. But no suitable boat was to be had, and the pair mounted their camels and pushed on to the next stage.

For the next three days the pace was kept up. Sometimes they picked up a boat at a riverside village, manned it with a strong crew, and pulled through the glaring day. Then they landed, secured fresh mounts, and rode on. Nothing tired Budgeon, yet he would have fared badly but for his companion's knowledge not only of Arabic but of Arab character. And as the English soldier toiled on in the heat, his face crimson, his eyes almost apoplectic, he found that Lawrence could outride and outlast him.

On the morning of the fifth day three spear-points of deepest azure drawn with the sharpness of steel against the luminous sky were visible. They were the tips of the Pyramids. Later in the day, while the gray walls of Cairo were still out of sight, they struck a picket of British cavalry. The officer drew up his horse and stared with astonishment at the pair.

"Why, Budgeon," he said, "where have you dropped from?"

The two men clasped hands. He was Gray of the Royals, Budgeon explained, and they were old friends.



Jack sat silent while the eager rush of question and answer betwixt the two went on.

"And the troops from India are behind you!" said the cavalry officer at last. "That's a big thing and a plucky thing," and he looked admiringly at Baird's messenger.

Then he told the great news. The French in Cairo had surrendered, the city was to be given up the next day.

Budgeon's face fell as he listened. "Then we poor fellows from India are too late after all;" and the expression of disgust on his red features threw the cavalryman into a fit of laughter.

"We are too late." That is the history of Baird's famous expedition packed into a phrase. It was daring in conception, singularly picturesque in its details, admirably led—Baird lost only three men in the march from Kosseir to the Nile—and yet it was a failure. It was whipped with storms across the Indian Ocean. It arrived at its destination a fleet with its Admiral missing, a General without his army. It struggled across the desert tormented by thirst, scorched by heat. It found its way for three hundred miles down the Nile to Cairo. And yet, during its whole course, it never saw a shot fired in battle!

The dates in the almanac register its failure. The desert march began on June 29; and Cairo had surrendered on June 28. Baird with his army arrived at Gizeh on August 8, only to find that General Hutchinson had left for Alexandria the day before. Baird followed, reached Rosetta on August 30, and learned that the French holding Alexandria had sent in a flag of truce on August 29!

CHAPTER XXXIX

A SURRENDERED ARMY

WHEN they were within a mile of the gray walls of Cairo, Budgeon rode off towards the British camp in search of General Hutchinson; but Jack, with Gray and his men, pushed on towards the city. The sun was setting, the black shadows lay long drawn out on the arid soil. Suddenly there came from the city the deep, sustained sound of a gun.

Gray pulled up instantly. The cannon-shot puzzled him. Had fighting broken out in spite of the agreement to surrender? Three armies—French, Turkish, British—who had been fighting each other only a few hours before, and were now tumbled together in an area so narrow, made a very explosive human compound. A jest, a passing quarrel, a hasty blow might easily spread into a battle.

While Gray with tightened rein leaned forward in his saddle, staring at the city, there came the sound of a second gun, and presently of a third. This was not the voice of guns in battle—quick, sustained, and furious; they were minute-guns—slow, measured, rhythmical. For a moment Jack thought they were the lament of a high-spirited army for its defeat.

But Gray was pushing on. He had plainly guessed



the significance of the guns, and Jack followed him. A crowd was pouring out of the gate of the city nearest the river. At its centre were long, steady lines of French soldiers. They moved at a slow pace, with bowed heads and arms reversed. In the space betwixt the two lines was a gun-carriage with a coffin lying upon it, a group of officers, bareheaded, following in the rear.

"That is Kléber's body," said Gray. "They are carrying it back to France, the greatest honour that could be paid to a soldier."

Jack looked with wonder at this spectacle of an army in the hour of its defeat honouring its dead leader.

"And he was not a Frenchman after all," Gray went on, "but a German, and the best man they had in Egypt."

Kléber was no doubt a magnificent soldier, and amongst all the gallant men who followed Bonaparte in the expedition to Egypt he played the noblest part. When Bonaparte suddenly sailed for Europe the act was nothing less than a betrayal. It was the escape of a General leaving his army to be destroyed. The French soldiers in Egypt, when the event was known, were at the point of mutiny. Why should not the rank and file follow the example of their Commander-in-Chief? The shipping at Alexandria was actually seized by the troops, who were bent on returning to France.

It was then that Kléber played a great part. He and Bonaparte were in open feud with each other, and the command of the army he had abandoned was thrust by Napoleon on Kléber as a trap. Kléber's wrath was furious and open; but he remembered his duty as a

loyal soldier, and his example saved the whole French army in Egypt from going to wreck. He was a sort of embodied conscience for his troops—a soldier's version of conscience, no doubt, with a very odd ethical strain running through it—but it was effective. Frenchmen are keen to recognise and quick to honour a noble act, and Kléber's loyalty to the task thrust on him restored the morale of the French.

When, a few months afterwards, Kléber fell under the assassin's knife, the grief of the army was deep and passionate. They were returning now to France, but they would not leave the dead body of the noblest soldier of them all to lie under the Egyptian sands; and with roll of drums and the peal of minute-guns, through long ranks of soldiers with bowed heads, Kléber's dead body was being carried to the boats. Jack was near enough to the French lines to see the faces of the men. They were veterans, their faces hardened in the furnace of battle and brown with the suns of Egypt; but many were in tears, some were openly sobbing.

At a little distance behind the gun-carriage was a cart with a bundle lying on it.

"That," said Gray, "must be the skeleton of the assassin. The beggars impaled him, poor wretch, and now they are taking his bones to France to show how they avenged Kléber's death."

At this moment a troop of Turkish officers riding past suddenly drew up, and a couple of their leaders pushed forward to stare at the passing coffin. It was the Grand Vizier with his staff.

"That is the man," whispered Gray, "who paid for the assassin's knife. The murderer, by Jove, looking at his victim!"



Jack was near enough to the Grand Vizier to see his face clearly. The strong features were impassive, the eyes that stared at the coffin had certainly no look of either remorse or pity in them. What pity, indeed, had a Turk to waste on a dead Frenchman!

The next day Jack succeeded in obtaining an interview with General Hutchinson. The British General had, beyond question, some of the qualities of a great soldier. He took command of the army after Abercromby's death, and his march to Alexandria was one of the most daring feats ever attempted. With five thousand British troops and a body of very uncertain auxiliaries in the shape of the Turkish forces, he marched to besiege a city garrisoned by thirteen thousand French veterans, leaving at Alexandria—within striking distance of his base, that is—another French army over ten thousand strong.

But seldom have fine soldierly qualities been hidden under a less soldierly guise than in the case of Hutchinson. As he sat in his tent Jack stared at him with wonder. His dress was slovenly, his shoulders were rounded, he blinked at his visitor with short-sighted eyes. His long, irregular features were yellow as if with jaundice. His speech was nervous and hesitating. He rose as his visitor entered, and went across his tent to a table to obtain a paper, and Jack could see that he walked in a fashion so shambling and ungainly that it would have filled a drill-sergeant with horror.

His manner was ungracious, and he stared at Jack while he told his story with eyes that seemed to be gazing into mere space. He offered no comment on the tale.

"You can go down with the troops," he said curtly

when Jack explained his anxiety to reach London. But this, Jack urged, meant much loss of time.

"I understand, sir, Colonel Montresor starts at once with despatches for London. General Baird was courteous enough to send me with his aide-de-camp; will you allow me to travel with Colonel Montresor?"

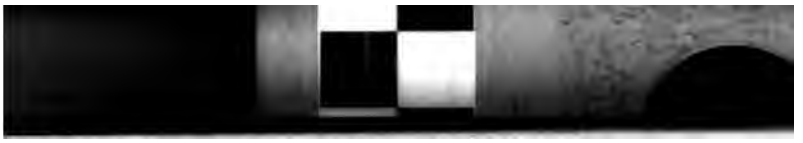
Hutchinson shook his head peremptorily.

"You have made the acquaintance of Lieutenant Gray," he said; "you can be attached to the mess of the Royals." And with that he dismissed him.

Jack could only register the vow that, while he would start with the troops, he would break away for the seacoast at the earliest possible moment.

The next day the columns began their march, and seldom in the whole history of war has a spectacle so strange been witnessed. It was a procession of three armies, all equipped for instant battle; but two of them were escorting the third, under a treaty of surrender, to the seacoast.

The Turkish army marched first. It moved on a wide, irregular front, with flanks that contracted or spread themselves out irregularly. It resembled a mob rather than an army. Next, with a wide interval betwixt the two, came the British forces, a little over four thousand strong. It was under Moore, a soldier with a genius for discipline that left an enduring mark on the British army of that day; and, as a matter of pride, the British troops were in the most exact order. They formed a tiny body—square, compact, solid, the ranks dressed as though on parade, the officers riding on the flanks of the columns, the guns with ammunition-waggons in the intervals betwixt the battalions, flanking-parties thrown out on either side.



Last came the French, an army of veteran troops familiar with victory; but its formation was loose, the columns were irregular, the officers marched or rode in clusters as they pleased. It was nearly fourteen thousand strong, with fifty guns, and it had surrendered to a force less than half its own strength.

Jack watched with astonished eyes the procession of flags go past him—Turkish, British, French; and the stream of faces was more picturesque than even the moving forest of flags. The Turks, in flowing dress, with fez and turban, with dark-visaged, expressionless faces; the square-shouldered, ruddy-faced British; the French, most of them little men, olive-complexioned, quick-eyed, with restless gestures. The Nile was black with boats carrying the sick, the wounded, and the plunder of the French army.

Jack meditated long on the spectacle. This, then, was the end of the proud army Napoleon led to Egypt. The fleet that carried that army had been shattered by Nelson's guns, and every ship in it was either sunk or a prize. Of the forty thousand gallant men with whom Bonaparte sailed from France, a third lay in nameless graves in the sands of the desert; another third was here, marching under the conduct of a British force less than half its own strength to the seacoast, to be sent back to France with the ignominy of surrender lying upon it; another third was besieged at Alexandria, and in turn would no doubt surrender.

The dream of the conquest of the East, and a triumphant march to India, was ending in a fiasco of this scale. Jack felt he was looking on a disaster sufficient to wreck the fame of a Cæsar.

And yet his old Brienne comrade had emerged

from it with fortunes undestroyed! Somehow he so dazzled the imagination of France that she forgot she owed to him a lost fleet and an abandoned army. So the failure in Egypt was only the stepping-stone to what it was already clear would be a throne. Was it genius, or only chance, which thus made disaster itself —and disaster on such a scale—the title to a prize so stupendous?

The human memory is very eccentric. It has what may be called its blind spots, patches where it fails to register events or where the machinery for reproducing them refuses to work. Every one remembers the surrender of Marshal Wurmser at Mantua in 1797 and of General Mack at Ulm in 1805. These are amongst the splendours of Napoleon's career. But no one, somehow, remembers the surrender of the army Napoleon himself led into Egypt, and abandoned there, a surrender as complete as that of the Austrians at either Mantua or Ulm.

As Jack watched the strange spectacle offered by the three armies, he reflected how widely his career and that of his old comrade had diverged. He had just struggled out of the ignominy of a slave's life; "*Paille au nez*" was on the steps of a throne. Jack knew he might have escaped that hateful slavery if he had accepted Bonaparte's offer outside Acre. Yes, his inconvenient conscience *had*, as his Brienne comrade warned him, "spoiled his career."

And yet he felt that he would go back to the sands of the desert and to the ignominy of Bedouin slavery a hundred times over rather than stoop to the baseness of such an errand as Bonaparte had proposed to him. He had lost some years of his life; but at least he had



kept his conscience clean, and he had emerged from the desert and its sufferings with character strengthened and purified. Bonaparte's dazzling career had a strain of falsehood and of Titanic selfishness running through it. That career, it was true, had escaped—though only by the narrowest interval—eclipse and ruin in Egypt, and had run on into new and unguessed splendours. But Jack felt sure that in the long run it must end in failure. It was in quarrel with eternal morality. The Egyptian failure, which no one seemed to adequately realise, was only the prophetic hint of some yet greater and final disaster.

The three armies camped at night in the order in which they marched; but the French, with true military instinct, changed their formation. They threw themselves into a great square, with the Nile for the fourth side, and artillery and baggage in the centre. It was thus a force ready to strike at a moment's signal. But when the camp-fires were lit, and sentries posted, many of the officers as well as of the rank and file both of the British and French wandered into each other's lines and sat in groups round friendly camp-fires.

From a hundred such groups the sound of jests and of laughter, with broken fragments of French and English, rose in the night air. There is a freemasonry amongst soldiers under such conditions. Only a few days before they were eager to meet at the bayonet's point. Now they might have been old and trusted comrades.

On the second night of the march a group of officers of the Royals, with Jack amongst them, strolled into the French lines. As they passed a camp-fire the light

of the flame fell on a face which Jack thought he knew. He stopped and looked more closely. It was Corporal Lebrun, now wearing a sergeant's badge, and looking a little leaner and older than when they parted outside Acre. The sergeant looked up as Jack halted, then sprang to his feet and stood at the salute. Jack put out his hand with a smile and a hearty word of welcome.

"I am glad to see you have won a step, sergeant. Thank you for that gift of your pistol when we parted."

The sergeant smiled afresh. "I knew the Arabs would not hold you long, monsieur; but I hardly thought we should meet again in Egypt. How did that *canaille* treat you?"

For a few minutes the pair stood chatting, while the officers of the Royals moved on.

"But, sergeant," said Jack as they were about to part, "you did not get into Acre after all."

"No," replied the Frenchman with an execration, "and that is why we are here;" and with a glance of soldierly disgust he flung out his hand in the direction of the British and Turkish camps. "We are tired of Egypt," he went on in explanatory tones; "there is a bigger field in Europe, and so we have agreed to go there."

"It is not a surrender, then?"

The sergeant's face flushed. "The veterans of the army of Italy do not surrender. We march with our guns and flags; there is no dishonour on our colours."

Sergeant Lebrun evidently tried to persuade himself that the march down the Nile was a friendly arrangement. The armies, on his theory, resembled duellists



who by agreement were moving to some more suitable field. And Jack forbore to remind him that arms and guns were to be surrendered by even "the veterans of the army of Italy" when they embarked at Rosetta.

"We have been three years in Egypt," the sergeant went on, "and no sensible man wants to stop here any longer. Egypt is an empty egg-shell. We shall be worth more to France *there* than here;" and he pointed in the direction in which he supposed Europe to lie.

Jack could not deny this. "Our lads," he said, "seem very friendly with yours."

"Yes," said the Frenchman with a patronising air; "they are good fighters, but they have no *élan*—no imagination. But there is no use our breaking each other's heads in this wretched country. We ought to fall into line together against those —— Turks."

"Where is Lieutenant Ricord?" asked Jack.

"Kléber shot him."

"Kléber!"

"Yes. He was in a plot to seize a ship and sail for France, and in the scuffle his major was killed. An example had to be made, and Lieutenant Ricord could be better spared than anybody else. The General wanted to stiffen discipline." And Sergeant Lebrun plainly thought this a quite sufficient explanation of the fate of Lieutenant Ricord.



CHAPTER XL

TO THE SEACOAST

THE pace at which the three armies crept down the river fretted Jack's patience sorely. He was burning to catch the first transport sailing for England. But on the third day of the march he learned that a squadron of the Royals and one of the Queen's, with a detachment of infantry, were to be sent forward in haste. Parties of French from Alexandria were raiding the country along the lower reaches of the Nile, collecting supplies for the garrison, and what cavalry could be spared was to be despatched to check these marauders. The detachment was under the command of the major of the Royals.

"You can ride with us," he said, to Jack's delight, "and you will get to the seacoast a week before the columns do, for we shall travel light and push ahead at speed."

The detachment started a little after midnight, and for hours the camp-fires behind them flung a crimson glow on the night sky. Presently these died away, and the stars shone clear in the deep Egyptian sky. Then came the many-coloured splendours of an Eastern dawn.



The party pushed on till noon, camped till sunset, and marched again through the night, halting once more when the sun rose. Horses and men were by this time almost wornout. The men were sleeping under the shade of some scattered palm-trees when half-a-dozen Arabs came riding furiously into the little camp with the news that a big French convoy was making for the river a few miles ahead. The major looked round on his slumbering force—the leg-weary horses, their heads hanging down as they stood in the shade, the men asleep in every attitude of weariness.

"Poor beggars!" he said, "there is not pace enough left in them for a dash. I'll give them a couple of hours more for rest; some of us, meanwhile, must ride out and pick up the enemy."

He gave a few brief orders, selected the horses that seemed least weary, and, with a couple of orderlies and Gray, mounted. Gray said a few words to him before they started.

The major turned round. "You speak French like a native," he said to Jack, "and the rest of us don't know a word of the language. Come and ride with us. Your horse is about the freshest in the camp."

Jack gladly accepted the invitation, and the little party moved off, the Arabs, who by this time numbered several hundred irregulars armed with every variety of weapon, eagerly galloping on ahead. They had ridden for less than an hour when the Arabs came riding back, and with eager gesticulations pointed to a black line clearly visible across the level brown landscape.

"Yes, there are the French," said the major, when he had looked for a minute through his glasses; and putting spurs to their wearied horses the group cantered

forward. When they were within five hundred yards of the French they drew rein. It was a formidable body, not less than seven hundred strong, of all arms, including heavy cavalry, a detachment of dromedary men, and a couple of light guns.

It had no stragglers. A line of infantry, four deep, formed the front of the detachment, and a similar line the rear. On one flank were the squadrons of the dromedary corps, on the other a strong body of dragoons. A huge convoy of laden camels, five or six hundred in number, was in the centre of the moving square. It was an almost perfect example of the tiny yet complete and most effective fighting units which the genius of Bonaparte organised for detached service, and by which he held down Egypt. It was formidable alike for attack and defence.

The major of the Royals whistled as he took in the strength of the French.

"They are too many for us, by Jove! It would need guns and infantry to break them up."

Then he looked at the swarm of Arabs about him. "We'll get them to hang on to their flanks and harass them. This will, at all events, serve to keep down the pace until our men come up."

With much trouble, and with the help of Jack, who acted as interpreter, the Arabs were persuaded to gallop past the flanks of the French and open fire upon them with their long guns. But the French commander was a veteran familiar with the methods of desert warfare. A fringe of tirailleurs ran out from the square, a spray of little active figures, who opened out at regular intervals, and knelt or fell at length on the ground and fired. They were cool and deadly marksmen, and the



Arabs promptly drew off, leaving a dozen of their number stretched on the sand. The major of the Royals by this time was looking back through his glasses towards the camp he had left for his squadrons.

"If they come they are not strong enough;" and his eyes dwelt angrily on the compact and orderly mass of the French, whose quick step had not been arrested a moment by the attack of the Arabs. "They will slip through our fingers," he said with an expletive.

"Why not try a game of bluff?" Jack suggested. "If you give me leave, major, I will carry a white handkerchief down to the French and summon them to surrender before your main body comes up."

"That will be cheeky, but perhaps it is worth trying."

"Let me ride down to their lines!" said Gray eagerly.

"But you don't know a word of French.—I must reckon you as one of my staff, Mr. Lawrence, and send you down."

The major lent his pocket-handkerchief. Jack tied it to the end of a spear borrowed from one of the Arabs, and, putting spurs to his horse, he cantered down to the French lines. More than one tirailleur fired at him as he came near, and the bullets whistled unpleasantly close; but he rode steadily on. Presently a French officer, followed by an orderly, rode out of the main body to meet him. He wore the uniform of a colonel; his deep-lined face and grizzled hair showed he was a veteran.

Jack had pulled up his horse less than a hundred yards from the French. The detachment halted, the dragoons dismounted, the men of the infantry threw

themselves on the sand, and every face was turned towards Jack. Something in the look and attitude of the French struck him. In physique and equipment they were soldiers of a formidable type, but they hardly wore the countenances of men on the eve of battle and eager for it. He knew the French, as a whole, were heartily tired of Egypt, and he resolved, if he could, to play on that chord.

The French colonel had pulled up while yet at a distance of a dozen yards.

"I come, monsieur," said Jack, "to propose that you surrender to the British. Our columns are advancing against you; resistance will be useless, and on grounds of humanity we offer you permission to go to France after laying down your arms."

As he spoke the words "*revenir en France*," Jack raised his voice so that they rang over the whole detachment. He saw a stir in the lines as the words swept down to them. Some of the men began to gesticulate.

The French colonel broke out into a torrent of angry speech.

"We know our duty," he cried; "it is to fight. Your proposal is a dishonour to us. I shall order my line to fire upon you if you do not at once withdraw."

"The offer of a passage to France is no dishonour," said Jack, and again he raised his voice on the "*revenir en France.*" "You will sacrifice your men in refusing it."

A fierce gesture was the Frenchman's reply, and Jack turned his horse round and rode slowly away; but he felt sure the incident was not yet closed. Presently he heard the sound of horse's feet behind him. He turned.



A French aide-de-camp was coming up at a gallop. "My colonel," he said, "wishes to hear your proposals again. He must consult with his officers upon them."

Jack expounded his proposal at length. It was, he explained, the terms which had been granted to the French in Cairo, and which a force thirteen thousand strong had accepted. The aide-de-camp rode back to his commanding officer, and presently a clamour of many voices rose amongst the French. The entire detachment, apparently, had resolved itself into a public meeting, and was debating the offered terms, nearly everybody talking at once. In half-an-hour the aide-de-camp returned with the proposal that the French should give up their camels and baggage, but that the detachment itself should be allowed to march back to Alexandria. By this time the major of the Royals had ridden up to the conference, and the squadrons of British cavalry were in sight.

"Tell them," he said to Jack, "I am not such a fool as to allow the forces holding Alexandria against us to be strengthened by so fine a body of men as this."

The French aide-de-camp bowed at the compliment, but shook his head fiercely at the renewed proposal to surrender. The French colonel now joined the group, his long, grizzled face wearing a very bewildered expression.

"His men won't fight," whispered Gray to the major.

This proved to be the case; and after an animated debate it was agreed that the French should lay down their arms on reaching the British headquarters, and should be sent in due course to France without being regarded as prisoners of war.

"By Jove, Lawrence," said the major, with a shining face, when the agreement was completed and the French had peaceably camped, "this is a big bag! It ought to be worth a step to everybody concerned. And we owe it to your bluff, old fellow."

The French were indeed a singularly fine body of men, over six hundred in all, including one hundred and thirty dragoons, and two whole squadrons of the dromedary corps—men chosen for their activity and daring, the very *élite* of the French army—with a swarm of Arab camel-drivers, and an immense mass of baggage and forage.

The Arabs, however, by no means regarded the event with the same complacency as the British. For them it represented a lost chance both of revenge and of plunder. They rode furiously around the little French camp with brandished weapons and cries of anger. The French regarded this performance grimly, and began to handle their muskets.

"If you can't keep that *canaille* quiet," said the French colonel, riding up to the major of the Royals, "we can, and will."

The major promptly drew a cordon of British cavalry pickets round the surrendered detachment, and by way of soothing the Arabs drew out a hundred of the laden camels as their share of the booty. The British infantry in the meanwhile were coming on the scene, and the major sent Gray at a gallop, to stop them.

"Explain to the Frenchmen, Lawrence," he said, "that I will not bring up my infantry, as their presence is not necessary;" adding, with a wink, "I don't want them to see what a handful they are."



It was night before all details were settled, and the British officers sat by the camp-fire, talking over the event of the day.

"You must stay with us, Lawrence," the major of the Royals said. "You can talk their lingo, and they trust you. It is a ticklish business keeping control of such a body of men—with arms still in possession and the Arabs buzzing round them like wasps—till the columns come up." And with a touch of keen regret Jack had to consent.

Two days later the three armies came up, and the major reported his capture to General Moore, who was in command of the British force, making handsome acknowledgment of Lawrence's services. Moore sent for Jack and personally thanked him.

"You are not in the service, and no reward can be offered you, but I shall be glad to report to the Foreign Office the value of the aid you have rendered in this business."

Jack looked with curious eyes at Moore. Already he had the reputation of being the ablest General in the British service. A great career seemed to await him. No one could foresee how it was to come to a premature end in the fight at Corunna, and to be eclipsed for all time by the fame of a still greater soldier known up to that moment only on Indian battlefields.

At Deroute, the order in which the armies marched was changed. The French had to pass to the front in order to reach Rosetta, where transports were waiting to carry them to France. The Turkish force swung off to the right; the British halted, and the French marched past them. It happened that the track at that

spot ran through a narrow pass, and the French fell into a long single column as they defiled through it. A cluster of British officers, some mounted, some on foot, stood on the slope of the hill commanding the exit from the pass, and watched the column as it emerged from it and deployed on a broader front as it reached the plain.

Up to this moment no one in the British army knew exactly the numbers of the French marching in their rear, and the scene they now witnessed was an astonishment for them. For hours the human stream flowed on, foot, horse, batteries of guns with ammunition-carts—no less than fifty guns were counted—the dromedary corps, &c. The men had the look of veterans. The equipment was perfect. The column marched at a quick step, with flags displayed and beat of drums.

"By Jove!" exclaimed one officer who stood near Jack, "they are three times our number. If they had turned on us it would have been a hard tussle."

"We should have beaten the beggars, sir," said a boyish-looking cavalry officer, who stood by him, with all the arrogance of youth.

"Yes, but there would not have been enough of us left at the end to be worth sweeping up."

This was true enough. Moore's force marching in front of the French did not amount to four thousand effective men of all arms. The French, by count of head, numbered thirteen thousand six hundred and seventy-two men, of whom only eight hundred were sick, with another five hundred invalids reported as "fit for garrison duty." The French, that is, were practically three times as numerous as the British, and in the event of battle the Turkish Army was a very doubtful quantity.



The British officers watching the interminable French column defiling out of the pass at last broke into a shout of honest laughter.

"Nobody ever saw a sight like this before," said one of them, "and nobody will ever see a sight like it again. These fellows could eat us up if they only had appetite enough."

At last the long succession of horse and foot ended. Then came a jumble of baggage-carts and loaded camels, a disorderly troop of six or seven hundred auxiliaries—Mamelukes and Greeks—and then a little company of civilians; the staff of the schools, of the library, of the printing press, of the central bureau, etc., that Bonaparte took with him to Egypt. They seemed oddly out of place in the tail of such a body as had just marched past, and Jack watched them with amused eyes.

Suddenly he started. A Frenchman in civilian costume, mounted on a mule, lifted his face and looked curiously at him as he rode past. It was M. Duclos! Jack had an unforgetting memory for a face, and he was sure that the figure already being lost in the crowd was that of madame's old major-domo. What had brought him to Egypt? He was not a soldier. He had courage enough of a sort, but it was of a dark and subterranean order, and certainly would not carry him of its own impulse into the fighting front of an army. Probably Paris had grown dangerous to him, and he had seized the chance of a civilian appointment in Egypt to escape.

That night Jack had no difficulty in discovering the place in the French camp occupied by the civil staff, and he found M. Duclos sitting alone by a little camp-fire. He looked older; the Egyptian sun had

added a darker tinge to his dark face, his hair was sprinkled with gray, but the eyes had their familiar look of craft. He showed no surprise when Lawrence came up. His vigilant eyes had promptly recognised him in the group on the hillside.

"I expected you to come," he said.

"Why?" asked Jack. "I certainly owe you no friendly attention."

M. Duclos shrugged his shoulders.

"There is something you want to know, and you think I could tell it to you."

"Yes, but I am sure you will not tell it except it suits your own purpose; and I sha'n't believe it unless there is some proof stronger than your own words."

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders afresh. "What is it you want to know?" he asked.

Jack hesitated. What could the Frenchman tell him worth knowing or capable of being believed? M. Duclos read his doubt, and it acted on him like a challenge.

"Do you want to know the truth about that will? It was a trick, as your English lawyers guessed; but it was a trick to defeat a wrong. Madame was my sister, though we both agreed to conceal our relationship. She was a good Frenchwoman, and served France in the only way a woman could serve her country. She married your father not because she loved him, but that she might serve France better. The marriage gave her a recognised position in London."

"And she lost it when my father found she was nothing better than a French spy."

M. Duclos's face grew darker.



"Yes, and why should I not have tried to save her from being punished for her patriotism?"

"Did madame know of the fraud in the will?"

M. Duclos hesitated. "How can I tell?" he replied sullenly. "I was willing to take all the risks of the fraud for her sake."

"I have heard no news from London for years," Jack said. "What about Denise?"

The eager voice betrayed him, and the Frenchman looked quickly up, while an evil light came into his eyes.

"I hear about her constantly, and can give you news. She is, like her mother, a good Frenchwoman. She went back to Paris as soon as public affairs grew quiet there, and she is married to a good Frenchman."

"Married!" cried Jack, who felt his face grow white, while the eyes of the Frenchman dwelt on him keenly.

"Yes, and happily married."

"What is her name now?"

"I do not think," said M. Duclos, with much deliberation, "I am justified in telling you. Why should you know? You would only disturb her domestic peace."

As Jack walked away from the interview the Frenchman's eyes followed him with a look of malign gladness.

"There are better weapons than the sword with which to stab," he muttered to himself.

Certainly no thrust of sword could have wounded Jack so deeply as the news he had just heard. The one shining hope of his life was blotted out with a word. Married! He shut his eyes, and Denise's face rose

before him in all its vivid sweetness. And now it was lost to him for ever!

In the tumult of bitter feeling the whole landscape of his life seemed blackened. It had been better, he whispered to himself, that he had perished in the desert with that hope burning like some clear altar-flame in the innermost chamber of his life than live in the gloom of quenched hope to the end of his days. The sense of loneliness, the bitter consciousness of cheated love, of all sweetest hopes wrecked, overwhelmed him.

For hours he walked to and fro in the darkness—the silent camp about him, the silent, star-filled sky over his head, but his own mind a tempest of distress.

Presently he pulled himself together. He could not blame Denise. He could understand how France drew her back as with a spell. And if another had won the priceless treasure of her love what grounds for complaint had he? No doubt in London they had long reckoned him as dead. "Happiness," he said to himself, "has gone out of my life, only duty remains." He would go unwedded to his grave. But he would do his work like a man.

Dawn came at last. The camp was awake, the men falling into line, when Gray came up.

"I have been looking for you, Lawrence, and I have good news for you. Some transports are sailing in a couple of days, and they can't refuse you a passage."

Jack's face, however, did not lighten at the news. He hesitated. "I am not sure," he said, "that I shall go."

"What has happened?" cried Gray. "You've been fretting to go for weeks. You have made us all feel



that you only endured our society, and longed for a chance of turning your back on us. And now that the chance has come you wear the look of a man who has received the news of the death of his dearest friend."

"Well, Gray, I have had news more bitter than the death of a dearest friend. England to me just now is not what it was a few hours ago." Then he reflected a moment. "Still, I suppose I must go, and you are a good fellow to bring me the news of the transports. No," he said, in reply to Gray's wondering eyes, "I can't tell you what it is, but it is the worst of news." And he turned away.

CHAPTER XLI

THE RETURN

JACK found no difficulty in securing a passage to London in the *Robert and Mary*, an apple-bowed transport, with stumpy masts, patched sails, and a hull like a barrel. Her lines gave assurance of a tedious voyage.

"She is a safe boat," said her master; "but," he admitted, "she *does* roll a bit."

To his disgust, Jack found when too late that a smart frigate, the *Amethyst*, was sailing the day before the transport, and would arrive in London at least a week earlier. He had already written to his uncle, telling of his escape and of his immediate return to London. It was a letter with the music of hope in every syllable. Now he wrote again by the *Amethyst*, telling how he had learned from M. Duclos that Denise was married and had returned to France. In a few hurrying and broken words he described his wrecked happiness and the reluctance with which he was about to sail for London.

"I could not return at all," he wrote, "but that it would seem ungrateful to you and to my aunt if I did not. Then, too, if everything else has slipped out of my life, duty remains, and I must live for it."



Meanwhile, in London, the long silence as to Jack Lawrence's fate had slain hope. He was mourned as dead, and each member of the little group in Portman Square paid him the tribute of a separate kind of grief. With Robert Lawrence it took the form of a fury of resentment at the ill-luck that flung away his nephew like a bit of worthless seaweed. "The lad had a great career," he would say; and it added a new sharpness to the lawyer's resentment to remember that his nephew's death had left a great estate without an owner. Mrs. Lawrence mourned for "Jack," as she always called him, with honest tears and a grief that had in it a motherly depth and tenderness; for Jack Lawrence had, unconsciously to himself, the rare gift of winning love. But Denise mourned for her lover with a deep and wordless sorrow, through which ran a dark thread of unforgetting remorse.

"I sent him to his death," she said over and over again to her aunt with quivering lips. To herself she added, as a new argument for remorse, "I hid my love. I let him go without telling him I loved him."

She did not weep, but her smile was often sadder than tears. Her face grew thin. In her deep eyes what can only be described as a white flame of grief burned constantly. An air of sad remoteness lay upon her, as one whose life is elsewhere. She would sit with bent head, her slender hands folded on her knees, in a listening attitude, as though expecting some voice to speak to her out of the depths of space.

"It is killing her," said Mrs. Lawrence, in distress, to her husband.

"Grief doesn't kill," was that practical gentleman's reply. "But she grows more beautiful with it all;"

and with a touch of unaccustomed poetry he added, "her face is as luminous as a porcelain vase with a light inside it."

One morning Robert Lawrence on going into his office found a letter lying on his desk with an Egyptian postmark. As he took it up his fingers trembled, the characters on it seemed to dance before his eyes.

"Good God," he whispered, "it's Jack!"

It was the letter which told of his adventures in the desert, his escape, his immediate return to London. A fire of exulting gladness ran through the words. As he read the letter there crept to the eyes of Robert Lawrence, almost to his own astonishment, the rare moisture of tears, and he brushed them away with ashamed haste, although there was no one near to see them.

How was he to break the great news? He thought the shock would be enough almost to kill Denise, a touch of masculine simplicity for which his wife later laughed at him. "Good news, you simpleton," she said, "is much less likely to kill than great sorrow."

After a few moments of agitated consideration Robert Lawrence hurried away, to his clerk's astonishment, leaving briefs, solicitors, and clients without either explanation or apology. When he reached his house he ran with eager steps up the stairs. He would give his wife the intelligence and let her tell Denise. "Women understand each other," he muttered to himself.

"Where is your mistress?" he shouted to one of the maids.

"She is out, sir."

At that moment the door opened, and Denise came



in, her face with its pensive beauty looking more like a bit of illuminated porcelain than ever. She smiled in greeting to her uncle, and then something in that gentleman's face startled her. She looked steadily at him, with lips that began to tremble. The very pupils of her eyes seemed to dilate, her woman's soul looked out of them; she was reading with swift and subtle insight the news lying unspoken in her uncle's brain. She had caught his sleeve with clutching, trembling hands.

"You have news," she whispered.

The hunger in her eyes, the anguish of longing with which she challenged him—all this was too much for Robert Lawrence. "Give me a kiss, little woman," he said huskily.

She kissed her uncle automatically, but she was watching his eyes with a gaze so still and intent that the toughened lawyer, with a soul almost as dry as his wig, felt his lips quiver.

"Yes, thank God!" he cried, and then he stammered out the great news. Jack was safe and well, and on his way home. He would have gone on with details and speculations, but Denise in a passion of gratitude had fallen on her knees, her face bowed on her hands. She was praying, and Robert Lawrence stole on tiptoe from the room. Its atmosphere was too sacred for him to linger in it.

Denise was still kneeling in a passion of silent and adoring thankfulness when the door opened, and with hurrying feet and face covered with happy tears Mrs. Lawrence broke into the room. She stopped as she saw the kneeling figure and the bowed head, then she softly knelt down too. Without a word, Denise put

out her hand to her aunt, and with clasped hands the two women gave God thanks.

The weeks that followed ran fast, and ran to music. Happiness is a strangely subtle artist. It was summer-time, the garden was a tangle of roses, the air was rich with perfume; morning came with the carol of the lark, the evening was rich with the song of the nightingale. But no colour or perfume in summer gardens and no music in the summer sky was half so rich as the happiness which now made Denise's life beautiful and fragrant. A diviner summer than sun-filled skies can create—the summer of love and gladness—had come, and come suddenly, to her, and every faculty in her broke into blossom.

"Little woman," said her uncle to her, "Jack's a lucky fellow to have a sweetheart with a face like yours waiting for him."

Denise tossed her head gaily. "You must not call me his sweetheart, sir. You are too premature."

Three weeks later came Jack's second letter, telling how he had heard the news from M. Duclos that Denise was married and gone back to France. "I cannot complain," he wrote. "I suppose you all counted me as dead. In any case, Denise was free. She knew I loved her, but she never said a word which entitled me to say she loved me. I suppose that happiness was beyond my deserts. So end all my dreams. The news has changed the whole aspect of my life. At first I thought I would stay in Egypt. To come back to the familiar circle and miss her face would be a pain too great. But I owe something to you and to my aunt; and, after all, I dare not spoil my life. So I am coming back, and in a transport which sails almost at once.



But sometimes I am tempted to wish I had found a quiet grave in the desert sands."

Robert Lawrence stormed furiously at the news, and expended many epithets on "that lying scoundrel Duclos," and even discharged a few at Jack's "stupidity" in believing such a tale. Mrs. Lawrence, her eyes snapping with equal anger, listened to her husband's expletives with unashamed sympathy.

Denise read the letter with flushed cheeks and kindled eyes. "How could he think it?" she whispered. Then she laughed a laugh so full of happy mirth that it sounded like a running chime of silver bells. "The foolish fellow!" she cried, and wiped from her eyes the tears the laughter had brought.

"It is no laughing matter to him," said Mrs. Lawrence in aggrieved tones. "It has almost broken his heart."

But Denise had no pity to waste on her too credulous lover. "He should have known me better," she said.

"The news," Mrs. Lawrence went on, "might have prevented him coming back to England."

Denise's face grew pale at that suggestion, but her new-found happiness was of a courageous temper. It had not survived the sea and the desert to be killed by a lie on the lips of M. Duclos.

"He would have found out in time," she said, "and then he would have come."

So they all waited with mingled feelings for Jack's homecoming.

CHAPTER XLII

ON THE ROAD HOME

MEANWHILE, the *Robert and Mary*, on which Jack sailed, was butting her slow way against contrary winds along the whole length of the Mediterranean and round the coast of Spain. The slow, eventless days were for Jack an intolerable weariness. He had no Grant with his unquenchable cheerfulness beside him, and no softly smiling face of the woman he loved before him. The captain was a rough merchant-seaman, with no thought beyond the daily run. Jack himself was in a lonely mood, and he paced the deck day after day with restless feet and a fretting heart. He had lost since he last crossed these waters, he sometimes reflected, three years of his life.

Or had he lost these years? his wiser thought demanded. The Bedouin camp, the cruel desert, had been for him a school; they had the office of fire and water on steel—they had tempered his whole nature. He had come from them with every sense in his body and every quality of his character braced. Yes, the years were not lost. But, as he reflected bitterly, the love that made life sweet was lost. And then he paced the deck afresh with a sort of restless fury, as though peace was to creep into the mind through the tired senses of the body.

The *Robert and Mary* sailed without convoy, for she was armed, and the Nile had swept the Mediterranean, as with a besom, of privateers.

"But the narrow waters are infested with French privateers, captain?" Jack suggested.

"Yes, there are plenty of luggers and sloops and such small fry in those waters; but none of them will touch the *Robert and Mary*." And Captain Harvey ran his eye with pride along his twelve-pounders.

The light on the Lizard was sighted at last, and Jack leaned over the bulwark gazing long at it. That tiny point of light was something more than a signpost for passing ships. How much there was behind it! It stood for England and all that England held and meant; and in Jack's eyes it seemed a starry splendour full of strange and glorious meanings.

The next day they were running along the English coast—headlands and green hills, valleys rich with blossoming orchards, the smoke of towns, clustering villages, the white edge of the foaming sea running along the line of brown sands. It was an English landscape lying under summer skies, and there are not many fairer sights on the planet.

"We shall see the light on Beachy Head before midnight," said the captain as the sun went down.

But English weather is changeable. As night fell a fog was drifting down the Channel; it blotted out both the stars in the sky and the gleaming lights on the coast. The captain reduced his canvas, set a seaman in the chains with lead and line, and so groped his way slowly through the fog. Jack paced the deck for hours; then, tired of staring into the gray darkness, went to his cabin and turned in.

He was awakened a little after midnight by the roll

of the ship on a new course. There was the sound of naked feet on the deck above him, of ropes flung on the deck, of orders given in suppressed tones. Something in the sounds—something furtive and hurried—startled him, and he sat up in his bunk. Presently he caught the sound of a voice giving orders in French. He leaped out of his bunk and commenced to dress hurriedly; but before he had half-dressed the door of his cabin was thrown open and Captain Harvey himself was thrust in and the door closed and locked behind him. The captain's dress was disordered, he was hatless and breathless, and a general aspect of fury was on his red features.

"What is it?" asked Jack in astonishment.

"A d——d French lugger tumbled on to us in the fog," he said ashamedly, "and we are a prize."

"Were your lookouts asleep?"

But to that question the captain could offer no reply except a succession of marine oaths.

"What are they doing with us?"

"They are running, I guess, for the mouth of the Seine, and they will slip across the Channel safely before day breaks unless some British frigate stumbles across us."

Here was the prospect of a new captivity just at the moment when English shores were in sight, but Jack faced the prospect with an unconcern which puzzled himself. Had liberty ceased to be of value to him, or had he caught from the desert a touch of its fatalism? He would be on French soil, he reflected, within half-a-dozen hours; and France meant Paris, and Denise was in Paris! His heart kindled at the thought. Yet if Denise were happily wedded it was better, he felt with a pang of unspeakable bitterness, they should not meet.



Captain Harvey proved right. The lugger crept safely back across the Channel through the fog, and as day was breaking brought her prize safely into Honfleur, and dropped anchor in that little port with loud clamour of exultant voices.

"D—— the noisy beggars!" said Captain Harvey heartily, whose notion of discipline was British. "They couldn't make more to-do if they had captured a line-of-battle ship."

When the anchor had dropped boats came quickly alongside, and there was a new tumult of feet and voices on the deck. Captain Harvey was ordered up, and went with disgust written on every feature of his red face. An hour later Jack in turn was summoned, and he found himself in the presence of a commissioner in epaulets, who sat at a table under the break of the poop, with the ship's papers spread before him.

"You are *un diplomate*, monsieur?" said the commissioner.

Jack hesitated. "Well," he said, "I was, three years ago, in the service of the British Foreign Office; but for that period I have been in Egypt."

"That is a circumstance which makes your capture very fortunate for us, and we understand you were actually with the British army. You can give us information as to the state of affairs in Egypt."

"But I do not know why I should do that," said Jack coolly. "There is war betwixt England and France, and any news I could give might have a value beyond what I can guess."

The commissioner tried all his arts, from persuasion to menace, to wring some information from Jack; but in vain. He was in a stubborn mood. At last the

Frenchman announced, with a certain air of menace, "You will be sent to Paris."

Jack could easily understand that news from Egypt was keenly desired in France, where the fate of the army was yet unknown, and for that reason he believed he ought to refuse to give it. The crew of the captured transport had, no doubt, talked; but they could only give port-gossip.

In Paris Jack was examined by one official after another, but remained coolly but obstinately silent. "I will not tell," he declared, "what may injure the interests of my own country or serve the interests of the country with which she is at war."

He was at last told that the First Consul himself had given instructions that the English diplomat was to be brought before him. Jack was thus to see his old comrade of Brienne once more.

Napoleon had taken up his residence in the Tuileries; and as Jack, in charge of a couple of gendarmes, walked through the echoing corridors of the great building, and waited in the antechamber for his interview with the First Consul, he recalled the scene of August 10, when the Tuileries was stormed by the crowd, its corridors splashed with blood, and the unhappy Swiss slaughtered in its gardens. The unfortunate Louis, when he stepped across the threshold of his palace that day, had left it and his crown for ever; and now the nameless artillery officer who at Jack's side had watched the rush of the crowd on the Tuileries sat as master in the great palace itself, where kings had once dwelt. So strange are the reverses of history!

Presently the door opened, and Jack found himself in the presence of the First Consul. Napoleon stood



in front of the great marble fireplace, his hands behind his back, his head bent forward in meditative pose, exactly as he is seen in many well-known paintings. But the long locks and the simple dress of republican days and fashions had gone. Something of royal state was already gathering round the First Consul of France. He was splendidly dressed in a coat with high collar glittering with gold embroidery, he wore silk stockings and shoes, his hair was cut short. His face was fuller than when Jack saw it last, the brown of Egyptian suns had gone from it, it had the contour and the tint of marble. The eyes were keen and masterful as ever, but the look of challenging discontent in them had vanished. Napoleon's genius had found its true field at last, and he was no longer in a mood of furious discontent with an unattained "destiny."

As Jack looked at him he remembered this was the man of Marengo and of the Concordat. He had given France glory first, then social order, and it seemed as if he were about to give it peace. There was war still with England, it is true; but the peace of Lunéville was a great relief to France, and seemed to be the prelude of a still wider peace.

Jack stood with these reflections running through his brain, and looking with curious eyes at his old comrade, when Napoleon awoke from his abstracted mood. He lifted his head and glanced at the figure standing at the other side of the table. Then the pupils of his eyes seemed to dilate with surprise. His glance ran with its old swiftness over Jack's face and figure.

"*You!*" he said in a note of wonder, and as if speaking to himself. Then he glanced down at the paper before him. He had not detected in the "John

Lawrence" reported to have been captured in the transport the "Jean Laurente" of his boyish days.

"You!" he repeated in a louder tone as he looked again at Jack.

"Yes. I owe you no gratitude for my life, for you sent me back to the desert. But I made my escape, and was in sight of England when the French lugger captured us."

Jack found to his own wonder that the spell of his old comrade over him seemed to be broken. The master of the Tuileries affected him less than the cadet of Brienne with his Corsican patois, or the little artillery officer, shabby in uniform and haggard of features, of later days. He could see him with a certainty of vision, and judge him with a courage of which he had never before been conscious.

He had sat down at a gesture from Napoleon, and laying his hands on the table looked calmly and with steady eyes at the First Consul. There was no halo about him. The fame of great victories, the splendour of a great position, the glamour of supreme genius seemed to Jack irrelevant. Perhaps sorrow had purged his vision. Or had those years in the desert brought him in touch with the ultimate realities of things? Perhaps as he sat there he saw Napoleon against the background of the failure in Egypt, of the scene outside Cairo—the dead body of Kléber carried through the ranks of a mourning army.

"You were obstinate," Napoleon was saying. "I gave you a chance at Acre; it was only to carry a message, yet you refused."

He frowned darkly while he spoke. Jack saw that once more he was looking in imagination at the gray, shot-pitted walls of the little Syrian town. That was



the great arrest of his career, and no later triumphs compensated for it. He had gained the West, but lost what fitted his genius better—the East.

"I refused," said Jack simply, "because I would not go on a base errand."

"Any trick is fair in war. But you were always simple, and you have paid the price," and he looked half-satirically at Jack. "How did the Arabs treat you?" he went on.

"How would a group of Bedouins treat a white slave and a Christian?"

"They did not kill you, they did not even harm you," and Napoleon's eyes ran over the tall figure, the square shoulders, the clear eyes, the strong, grave face on the other side of the table.

"God kept me," said Jack, looking steadily at Napoleon.

"How did you escape?"

"God delivered me."

The First Consul shrugged his shoulders, dismissing this explanation with a smile.

"You might have shared my fortunes," he repeated. "You flung away a great chance when you twice refused to join me."

Jack quite understood the contrast these words suggested. He might have walked, a glittering figure, along the corridors of the Tuileries instead of trudging, a slave, under the desert heats, with a tribe of Bedouins. But he shook his head with a smile. "I made my choice, and I don't regret it."

Napoleon had the faculty of a great leader for choosing good instruments, and this Englishman, his old comrade at Brienne, had, it was plain, many qualities which would make him useful. He knew

French as though he had been born in Paris. Was he not himself half-French indeed? His loyalty was beyond proof, he was incapable of falsehood, and with a flash of characteristically swift insight Napoleon saw that Jack's experiences in the desert had developed new and fine qualities in him. The long limbs, the square head, the steadfast eyes, the lines of thought and power in the grave face—here was a human tool of a magnificent sort. He looked at Jack.

"I have a use for you still," he said significantly.

Jack shook his head quietly, and the half-sad smile that crept to his lips was a more decisive negative than even the shake of his head. With his swift, sure glance Napoleon read the unshakable purpose behind the smile and the gesture, and he changed the subject abruptly.

"What can you tell me," he asked, "about affairs in Egypt?"

Jack looked at him. Why, he asked himself, should he not tell? The news had not yet reached France of the surrender of the French at Cairo, nor of the strange terms accepted; but it must come within a few hours. Meanwhile, there was, Jack was conscious, a certain relish in telling the tale of the ignoble close of the great expedition to Egypt to the very author of that strange enterprise. So he told the whole story. He had witnessed a sight without precedent in history—a French army fifteen thousand strong being convoyed by four thousand British and an uncertain body of Turkish irregulars to the seacoast to be ignobly deported to France. Alexandria was being besieged, and would certainly follow the example of Cairo.

"The fleet that carried you to Egypt was destroyed,"



he said, looking steadily across the table at the First Consul, "and not a man of the army you led there will leave Egypt except as a prisoner of war. Your monument in Egypt is found in the sunken wrecks in Aboukir Bay and in a whole army captive or slain."

Napoleon listened with inscrutable face. Nobody before had ever spoken in such a fashion to him. But if the lines about his mouth grew tense, no gleam of anger shone in his eyes, no colour stole into his impassive countenance. He asked a dozen brief questions as to details; but his genius, it was plain, wasted no regrets on failure. Egypt was a card that had dropped out of the game. Jack, as he looked at him, wondered at the unshakable composure with which a tale of disaster and failure so complete was received.

Napoleon, on his side, gazed with a touch of wonder at the man who could tell him such a story with steady eyes and in speech so calm. And this was his fellow-cadet of Brienne! He recalled the eager, boyish docility of far-off days. What had changed that pliant temper into a nature that had the unyielding hardness of steel? As he studied Jack's face he saw there was something unspoken that saddened the keen blue eyes and made the youthful face grave; some deep underlying trouble that made its subject indifferent to the ordinary ambitions and prizes of life. Escape from slavery, for him, had not been an escape into happiness. Some half-kindly impulse stirred in Napoleon.

"You shall be liberated," he said abruptly, "and sent back to England. I could not break faith with your Arab captors outside Acre, but the way is clear here." And Jack admired his magnanimity and half-regretted his own blunt speech.

CHAPTER XLIII

AT LAST

JACK, under a flag of truce, was put aboard a British sloop-of-war keeping watch outside Boulogne, and was landed a day later at Dover. He had time to reflect in the interval whether his good luck was not due to the fact that Napoleon was willing to get out of France as promptly as possible a witness who knew too much. He did not want the disastrous news from Egypt to be made public just then.

A mail-coach from Dover carried him to London, and Jack stepped from it on to the pavement just as dusk was falling. He looked round at the well-known streets with a strange feeling. Here were the prosaic-looking buildings, the stream of ruddy English faces, the crowded traffic. The familiar English speech reached his ears from every side. It seemed as if all the years betwixt, spent under alien skies and in such wild scenes, faded out of his memory. He could have walked to his room in the Foreign Office and sat down at his desk as though the current of his life had never been broken.

He had arranged for his scanty luggage to be sent on to Portman Square, and he walked on through the streets, drinking in the sights and sounds about him through every sense. A hundred times some face which seemed familiar arrested his steps. It was as



though his life were readjusting itself to the old conditions of existence by a sort of automatic effort of memory. He walked on till his uncle's house rose before him, and he stopped at the sight. A thousand recollections, bitter and sweet, surged up within him.

It was night by this time. The lights were burning in the house, but the blinds were still undrawn. His hand was stretched out to pull the bell of the door when a woman's figure moved into the full light of the drawing-room. Jack stopped, a thrill ran through his blood. The slender figure, the graceful pose of the head, the rich mass of hair above the oval features were unmistakable. It was Denise! He believed her to be hundreds of miles distant, somewhere in Paris, with the separating Straits stretched betwixt them. But she was here in London! And, as his eyes dwelt upon her, it was the Denise not so much of his memory as of his dreams—the vivid face, the exquisite set of the brow, the poise of the head on the slender neck; Denise under an English roof, and set in the familiar framework of his uncle's house.

As he looked and wondered, shaken with agitation in every nerve, Denise moved into the full light of the lamp, and stood musing with bent head. Her attitude recalled the girlish figure with hooded face lit by the candle on the stairs in madame's house in Paris of years before. Her figure, though tall and straight, was so maidenly or even girlish that it seemed incredible she could be a wife. The picture was exactly that which love had painted a thousand times over on the canvas of his imagination, a face out of which tenderness and loyalty looked.

A hot, unreasoning wave of feeling swept through him. He pushed open the door, crossed the hall, and

entered the drawing-room, shutting the door softly behind him. Denise turned in leisurely fashion, with the meditative look still on her face, thinking it was her aunt who had entered. She lifted her head and stood arrested, an image of unbreathing wonder. The colour had died out of her face, her lips were trembling.

"Jack," she whispered, as if to herself, and the next moment she was in his arms, with a deep, long sigh—a sigh half-sob—of perfect content.

What he said Jack could not have told. He was kissing passionately, again and again, her rich hair. She lifted her head at last, with flushed cheeks and eyes brimming over with happy tears, and looked at the dark, careworn face of her lover, and as she looked love shone like a flame in them.

But Jack's eyes were not in search of hers. He had spoken her name, but for the rest speech seemed to have forsaken him. He had caught her left hand and lifted it into the light, his eyes searching the slender fingers eagerly for the ring he feared to see there. Her face flushed as she yielded her hand to his grasp.

"How could you think it?" she whispered.

No question had been asked, but Denise knew what the questioning eyes meant. Then Jack stooped and kissed her lips.

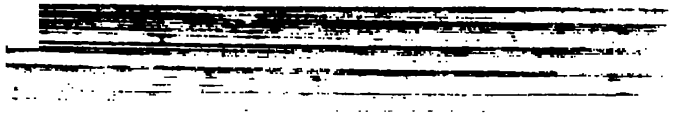
"Thank God!" he said.

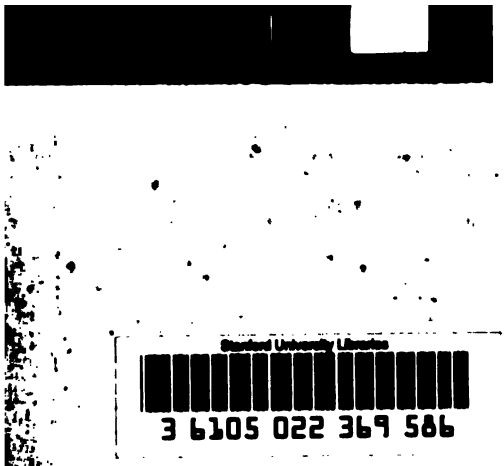
"Yes, thank God you are back!"

"Oh yes," said Jack hurriedly; but in a deeper voice and with another meaning he repeated, "Thank God!" Then his eyes turned afresh on the ringless finger, and Denise's cheek flushed a richer colour as her lover lifted it to his lips and kissed it again and again.

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